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University of Pittsburgh

Founded in 1787 in Pittsburgh as the Pittsburgh Academy, an extension of the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Pittsburgh (Pitt) is one of the most comprehensive urban universities in the United States. Pitt is also a state-related university. It offers tuition and fees closer to those charged by public universities while state government provides no subsidy for these charges.

Pitt has just under 18,000 undergraduates, about the same as Boston University and the University of Southern California, which are exceptionally selective private universities. Pitt also has an undergraduate student body that is considerably smaller than Penn State-University Park (approximately 40,500) or Temple University (around 28,300), also state-related universities within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Pitt is frequently cross-shopped against all of these schools as well as other city-based private universities such as Northeastern and NYU and member schools within the Big Ten Conference. Pitt's undergraduate enrollment is also smaller than many of these schools, including the Rutgers-New Brunswick, University of Maryland-College Park, University of Michigan, University of Minnesota and Ohio State, which are located in or near larger cities.

Pitt requires applicants to choose a school, though it does not force them to choose a major. Prospective freshmen apply to the Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences, the College of Business Administration, the Swanson School of Engineering or the School of Nursing. Students who are interested in education begin their degree program at the Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences as do students in Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, Information Sciences, Pharmacy and Social Work. Pitt's University Honors College cuts across the schools and offers an added opportunity to earn a Bachelor of Philosophy (BPhil) degree.

Overall, Pitt offered admission to just over half (53 percent) of the prospective students who wanted to become part of the freshman class in 2015. Pitt welcomed just over 3,900 freshmen to that class, just under a quarter of those who were admitted. Pitt wait-listed nearly 2,400 applicants, offering admission to only 170.

But this is not a complete story of Pitt admissions. Admissions to the pre-professional programs are likely to be far more selective than they are for the university as a whole. According to the university's 2016 Fact Book, among the nearly 18,000 undergraduates at Pitt, more than 10,000 are enrolled at Dietrich. The Swanson School has around 2,900 full-time undergraduates, fewer than many technical schools that offer mainly engineering degrees. The College of Business Administration has 2,100 undergraduates. The School of Nursing has approximately 550. Transfers from Dietrich into the business school as well as the engineering school are not impossible. But they



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would likely require a student to remain on campus for an additional semester or summer classes.

Pitt attracts very good to excellent students to a freshman class. The average GPA for incoming freshmen in 2015, among those who submitted grades, was a 4.0 according to Pitt's 2015-16 Common Data Set. Nearly three quarters of the class had a GPA of 3.75 or higher. The middle 50 percent of the class that submitted SAT scores scored between 1180 and 1350 (out of 1600) on the Math and Critical Reading sections of the test. Nearly two thirds scored over 600 on the Critical Reading section of the SAT while nearly 80 percent scored over 600 on the Math section of the test. The average unweighted GPA for the class was a 4. The range for the ACT Composite was between 26 and 31 (out of 36).

Pitt retained 92 percent of the students who entered the university in 2014, excellent for a state university. The four-year graduation rates in 2009 and 2010 were 64 and 65 percent, also excellent.

Costs

Pitt charges the highest in-state tuition and fees of any state-supported or state-related university in the United States. For 2015-16 they ranged from approximately \$17,300 for the Dietrich School to \$21,800 for those enrolled in the College of Nursing. Students who begin their education in Dietrich then later transfer over to the School of Rehabilitative Health Sciences or the School of Pharmacy will see their charges rise by around \$4,000 and \$10,000 respectively as they continue their degree program at that school.

Pitt's out-of-state charges are fairly reasonable compared to the more selective public Big Ten Universities (Illinois, Maryland and Michigan) as well as private options in other large cities. Non-resident tuition and fees ranged from approximately \$28,100 for the Dietrich School to \$35,700 for the College of Nursing. Pitt is a better value for a non-resident student—they make up about 40 percent of a freshman class—than Indiana, Michigan State, Purdue or the University of Iowa which charge more but are less successful at retaining and graduating a freshman class. It should be also noted that schools such as Boston University, Northwestern, NYU and the University of Southern California are not likely to discount tuition and fees to Pitt's charges to successfully recruit a similar student.

Pitt does not offer many merit scholarships. Nor does the university do a good job at meeting financial need. Only six percent of the freshmen who entered in 2015 received a merit scholarship; this awards averaged approximately \$10,400, according to the university's 2015-16 Common Data Set. The university met, on average 61 percent of need, for the first-year students determined to have need. Pitt also reported to *Big*



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Future, the College Board's search site, that only 15 percent of the class had their full need met.

Students who graduated in 2014 who took out loans borrowed, on average, approximately \$36,500 according to the Project on Student Debt. However, this might have included students who graduated from the Pharmacy school, who are considered graduate students for their last two years in that degree program. The same is true for students who made accelerated progress towards other advanced degrees. The average indebtedness, even if it is lower, is still likely to be higher than the maximum of \$27,000 that a graduating senior would be permitted to borrow through the Federal Stafford Student Loan program to complete a degree in four years.

Pitt also reported to the Project on Student Debt that nearly a third of its 2014 graduates who needed to borrow took out loans from sources other than the Federal Government. This is exceptionally high, considering that two-thirds of the graduates had to borrow to help cover their costs of their education.

Curriculum

Pitt takes the liberal arts more seriously than many comparable state-supported schools as well as many urban private universities. The university does not, for example, have separate undergraduate schools for visual and performing arts, communications or public affairs as some of these schools do. These majors are offered within the Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences instead. The school's [general education requirements](#) are quite similar to those in the colleges of arts and sciences at similar universities. The differences: a semester of Philosophy or History of Philosophy and Science (this is a "signature" department at Pitt) is required as are three courses in the Natural Sciences (versus two at similar schools). Dietrich does not have a Freshman Seminar requirement as similar schools do, though the second-semester English Composition course is called a seminar. Pitt also offers a selection of 14 languages, including American Sign Language, more than most similar schools. Two semesters of a language is required though there are exemptions for those who did well in their language study in high school.

Pitt allows students in Dietrich to be considered for [a dual degree in a liberal arts major and general business](#), but these students cannot pursue one of the specialty business majors such as finance or marketing unless they remain at the university for an additional year. Pitt does not allow Dietrich students to pursue a business minor. However, they have options to pursue 18-credit certificates in business-related areas including Accounting, Digital Media, Information System Design, Leadership, Non-Profit Management and Writing for the Professions. There are also other certificate programs within Dietrich in areas such as various area studies, Geographic Information Systems and Nanotechnology and Engineering. The certificates are essentially approved minors



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to supplement a liberal arts major or possibly overlap with courses already taken to complete a major and/or a minor.

Pitt offers a unique, and exceptionally rigorous, [Bachelor of Philosophy \(BPhil\)](#). The BPhil is offered to students who are enrolled in the university's Honors College and is available to students in any major offered by the university. It requires an independent research project approved by Honors faculty as well as a thesis that must be [written and defended at the same level as a student who would be receiving a masters degree](#).

Pitt does not so much offer unique academic programs in either engineering or business as it does support programs for students who declare a major in either school. Pitt encourages study abroad equally in either school and has well-organized global studies programs for both as well as paid internships and team-based consulting projects. Graduates of either school will typically have completed two or more internships by the time they have earned their undergraduate degree. In addition, neither school forces incoming freshman to declare a major before they have started their first classes and both offer introductory project-based classes. Swanson students wait until the end of their second semester to choose their major. Business students do not concentrate on their major coursework until the start of their junior year. In addition, neither school caps its students out of a major as long as they meet the academic requirements to be admitted to that major.

The Swanson School of Engineering offers [cooperative education](#). Approximately half of the students take advantage of this opportunity. Unlike other co-op programs, the Swanson program hosts co-op job fairs during the fall and spring semesters in advance of course selection. Students interview with the employers of interest. In addition, students are enrolled for only one additional semester versus a full year as they are in other co-op programs. Students who have worked in one or two assignments are not forced to continue with the same employer. Co-op is worth one credit per work term. However, while co-op students pay no tuition, they pay a \$325/semester co-op fee (including the summer terms) as well as pro-rated student activities fees and computer fees. But those students who have co-op assignments in Pittsburgh may live in university-owned housing.

Pitt is also one of the very best schools to study in the [allied health professions](#). The number of offerings is larger than most state universities support while the university also hosts an internationally-respected medical center. Pitt is also perhaps one of the very best universities, for example, to learn to become an athletic trainer, given the opportunities to work with professional and college teams throughout the metro area.

Pitt offered more than 2,300 undergraduate classes in 2014-15, according to its 2015-16 Common Data Set. However, Pitt students also have the option of taking courses at



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other colleges in the city, including Duquesne and Carnegie Mellon, when a course is not offered at Pitt at Pitt's prices.

Expect large classes at Pitt unless you are fortunate to be admitted to the Honors College. Thirty percent of Pitt's undergraduate classes offered in 2014-15 had more than 50 students, according to the university's 2015-16 Common Data Set. Six percent had more than 100 students. This is to be expected at a large school where introductory courses in many majors (Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics, Economics, Physics and Psychology) are requirements for several degree programs in the liberal arts as well as the professional schools.

Pitt students gave their faculty a rating of 3.74 (out of a possible 5) on RateMyProfessors.com, about the same rating (3.71) as Penn State-University Park students gave their faculty. Pitt students held their faculty in about the same regard as students at Carnegie Mellon (3.76) and Rutgers-New Brunswick (3.74) in higher regard than students at the University of Maryland-College Park (3.64) but in less regard compared to students at Ohio State (3.83) and the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor (3.78).

Community

Pittsburgh is one of the very best college towns in the US, not only because it hosts several colleges, but also because the city is very easy to navigate by bus as well as incline cars into the downtown. Bus services are clean and very well-marked as are city signs directing travelers to attractions. The university's Peterson Events Center as well as the Consol Energy Center, home to the Pittsburgh Penguins, are large and modern enough to host most indoor sports and entertainment. While the university once hosted the NFL's Pittsburgh Steelers on its own field, Pitt Stadium, today the Pitt Panthers play on the NFL team's home turf. Pittsburgh can also boast of one of the most modern and attractive airports in the US. The city is also connected to New York and Chicago through Amtrak.

The Pitt campus is located in Pittsburgh's Oakland neighborhood, considered the cultural center of the city. The Carnegie Museum as well as the Carnegie Music Hall are in the heart of campus. The surrounding neighborhood, and much of the city, was featured in *The Dark Knight Rises* the last *Batman* movie starring Christian Bale. Schenley Park, one of the nation's finest urban parks, is only a ten minute walk away. In addition to nature and a zoo, the park offers ice skating in the winter and movies in warmer weather.

The Pitt campus, Schenley Park and the adjacent Carnegie Mellon University campus combine to make a college town setting that no other large university community, except possibly Ann Arbor, Berkeley or Madison could match. The campus, while small (only



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182 acres) for supporting a student body that totals around 30,000, including the graduate and professional schools, does not feel as crowded as, for example, GW, NYU or Temple. The university's signature building is the Cathedral of Learning, the tallest structure in the Western Hemisphere that is in continuous use as an academic building. Heinz Chapel is also a remarkable example of historic preservation on a college campus. While the university could not grow the campus easily, it has managed to acquire and successfully renovate older buildings in the area. The most prominent example is the William Pitt Union, the university's student center, formerly a luxury hotel in the city. However, Mervis Hall, which houses the business school, and the Swanson School of Engineering are concrete monolithic structures. These buildings were designed to put all academic, faculty and student services under one roof and to minimize the need to go outdoors in colder weather.

Pitt does more than other urban universities to encourage its students to use the community. Students receive free access to the Carnegie Museum, the Carnegie Music Hall, university sports events, the city's mass transit system and the incline cars from the downtown, among other amenities. They also receive discounted tickets to Penguins and Pirates home games. It would be very difficult for any student to come to Pitt and find nothing to do.

Pitt is more of a "spirit and sports" school than most other city-based universities. It is one of only five universities in the US to earn or claim national championships in college football (9) as well as men's basketball (2). Among city-based universities only the University of California-Berkeley can claim similar, though fewer, successes.

While Penn State is often referred to as the "football school" in Pennsylvania, Pitt has had more success in the sport. More recently, the Panthers, now members of the Atlantic Coast Conference, have played in more minor bowl games such as the Armed Forces Bowl, the BBVA Compass Bowl and the Little Caesars Pizza Bowl. According to *Steelers Digest*, the fan magazine for the NFL team, the Steelers have drafted more players from Pitt than any other college program. However, they have not taken a Pitt player in the draft since 2000. The Steelers have not drafted a Pitt player in the first round since 1989.

Pitt's athletic achievements go beyond football. The men's basketball team has made 10 straight NCAA tournament appearances with five Sweet 16 appearances as well as an Elite Eight appearance in 2009. Pitt also competes in 17 other varsity sports at the Division I level; the wrestling, women's basketball, women's swimming and gymnastics programs are the more successful.

Reported incidents of Disorderly Conduct and Theft trended upward at Pitt between 2011 and 2013, according to the [university's crime report](#). There were actually fewer reported incidents of alcohol and drug-related crimes than there were for thefts. Drug-related



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violations trended downward from 110 in 2011 to 21 in 2013. While the neighborhood is not as gritty as one might find around NYU, Temple or Penn, security for person and property could be better, especially since campus and city police cover the campus.

Comforts

Pitt houses just under a third of the freshman in Litchfield Towers, a cluster of three tall residence halls that resemble a science fiction writer's concept of an electric power generation station. The Towers offered shared services through a common lobby that connects the residential buildings and provides stores and services for students and guests. These are not the most attractive of residence halls. Each room looks more like a sliver of pie, as the corridors are round rather than straight. But these are the halls that prospective students and their parents see on the campus tour.

The best bet for freshman is to become part of a Living Learning Community. In addition to the Honors College and ROTC, Pitt offers [15 Living-Learning options](#). They are based in Bruce, Pennsylvania, Forbes, Panther and Brackenridge Halls. The Honors College is based in Sutherland Hall. Holland Hall is dedicated to freshmen women while Nordenberg is the newest co-ed hall. There is other good news; the room and board charges [average approximately \\$11,500 across campus](#), quite reasonable for a university that is located in one of the more viable neighborhoods in a large city.

While Pitt houses nearly all (97 percent) of a freshman class, less than half (44 percent) of the undergraduate student body lives in on-campus housing, according to the university's most recent Common Data Set. However, Pitt accommodates a higher percentage of its students on-campus than Penn State (35 percent) and the University of Southern California (33 percent), a city-based school that has about the same number of undergraduates. Pitt also houses a larger percentage of its undergraduates than the University of Michigan (33 percent) and the same percentage as the University of Maryland-College Park (44 percent)

Pitt allows first-year students to rush fraternities and sororities, according to the university's 2015-16 Common Data Set. Just under 14 percent of the freshman class chose to join one of these organizations. They comprise just over a fifth of the undergraduate student body. But Pitt students do not really need to take part in Greek life. There are many other entertainment options in the city as well as near campus.

The university [owns a limited number of apartments](#) but the more attractive options are further from campus in neighborhoods such as Shadyside. The presence of Pitt and Carnegie Mellon as well as Chatham University in the area combine to create a buyers market for rental apartments for students. Rents per person per month were as low as \$400 according to the [university's off-campus housing directory](#).



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Connections

Pitt offers exceptionally comprehensive [career services](#) as well as [a very large alumni base](#) with well over 300,000 members. It is exceptionally easy for ambitious students to network with alumni within the city as well as on campus. [Nearly 80 percent of the graduates in the Class of 2014 were either working full time or continuing their education full time within a year after they had received their degree.](#) The university's career center runs many programs while also participating in a [virtual job fair](#) with universities based in the Atlantic Coast Conference and the Southeastern Conference. This events puts Pitt in a community that includes schools such as Duke, Georgia Tech, Notre Dame, UNC-Chapel Hill, the University of Virginia and Vanderbilt, among others.

Among the nearly 149,000 Pitt alumni registered on [LinkedIn.com](#), more than 59,000 live and/or work in or around Pittsburgh. More than 7,000 alumni are based in each of three other metropolitan areas: Philadelphia, Washington DC and New York. More than 2,000 are based in each of these areas: San Francisco, Boston, Chicago and Baltimore.

But while Pitt's alumni base is large and well supported by the university, the university reported an average alumni giving rate below 11 percent to *US News*. City-based universities tend to have low giving rates—Pitt's is actually better than Boston University and NYU, neither of which compete in high-profile college sports—but Penn State has a far more supportive alumni base. Just under 15 percent of their alumni, on average, made a contribution to their alma mater. For a more relevant comparison, the University of Southern California, which has an undergraduate student body of similar size as well as a more successful athletic program, has an average alumni giving rate of nearly 36 percent.

The Pittsburgh area's economic strengths are in the areas of education, health care and financial services although the presence of Carnegie Mellon and Pitt as neighboring institutions has helped to encourage technology-based businesses and start-ups to flourish. The city has most of the same amenities one would find in Boston, Denver, San Francisco or Seattle but with lower living costs.

Conclusions

Pitt is one of the leading state universities in the United States. It is also one of the best located for students who are interested in business, engineering and the health professions. Through the BPhil program as well as the offerings at Deitrich, Pitt takes the liberal arts more seriously than most similarly-reputable public universities and private urban universities. Pittsburgh is one of the best American college towns; the university is located in one of the city's best neighborhoods.



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It is as easy to enjoy a college experience in Pittsburgh as one would enjoy in a city such as Boston or Seattle. Pitt is also a great choice for those who want an urban university experience but also want to see their alma mater compete in sports at the highest levels. The very best students in an admit pool who might have wanted to attend a more selective private city-based school such as Boston University, NYU the University of Pennsylvania or the University of Southern California will not be disappointed in Pitt. The career services as well as the connections to be made are also excellent

The major faults with Pitt come down to some unattractive residence halls (Litchfield Towers), high resident tuition and fees as well as limited merit-based and need-based institutional financial aid. The latter is disappointing, given that the university has an endowment of over \$3.6 billion, about the same as Penn State, a university that serves a much larger student body. The numbers of reported incidents of theft and disorderly conduct are also a cause for concern. However, Pitt is a city university. College students must take appropriate precautions when they live in an city.

Pitt will satisfy the needs of most exceptionally bright students who would prefer a city setting to a more isolated college town, who also want the scope of academic programs and student services that only a large university can offer.

Report Card: University of Pittsburgh

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