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Update: Binghamton University (NY)

One of the Original 'Public Ivy' runners-up, Binghamton University is the most selective flagship campus in the State University of New York (SUNY) system. It has a relatively small population—just over 13,000 full-time undergraduates—for a flagship state school, and it houses just over half of them (52 percent) on campus.

It is not easy to get into Binghamton. 41 percent of the students who applied to be part of the Class of 2020 were offered admission. Their average SATs were 1310. SAT scores will be important in admissions. Seventy-nine percent of the Class of 2020 scored over 600 on the Critical Reading section of the test; eighty-six percent broke 600 on the Math. Students interested in business, engineering or the sciences would be expected to score closer to 700 on the Math. Thirty percent of the Class of 2020 did. The university waitlisted over 4,000 applicants, just under 13 percent of the pool, but only 276 were later admitted. The average GPA for the incoming students was a 3.7.

Students must indicate a school: Arts and Sciences, Engineering and Applied Science, Management, Nursing or Community and Public Affairs when they apply. But applicants to the most competitive programs are considered against each other. An applicant who is interested in economics, for example, at the Harpur College of Arts and Sciences, might have a less difficult time gaining admission than if s/he applied to the extremely competitive Accounting program in the School of Management. Binghamton uses the online Common Application as well as the SUNY Common Application.

Binghamton retained 92 percent of the freshmen who entered in 2015, excellent for any college of any size. More impressive, over 70 percent of the classes that have entered in 2010 through 2012 have graduated within four years, also outstanding. Binghamton is often shopped versus Cornell, Syracuse and the University of Rochester. Syracuse is the most similar school in terms of student body size and academic options. Binghamton costs a lot less than Syracuse and offers fewer small classes. But it does better at graduating a class on time.

Costs

Binghamton is one of the best buys in American higher education. New York residents are assessed less than \$10,000 in tuition and fees; those who qualify for the state's Excelsior program pay no tuition at all. Non-Residents are charged just over \$22,000 in tuition and fees. The state universities that attract an academically similar student body to offer enough merit aid to match or surpass non-resident tuition and fees at Binghamton will be the most selective honors programs at schools such as Georgia Tech, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill and the University of Virginia. All of these schools are also more selective than Binghamton.

Less than half of the students who graduated in 2016 had to take out Federal Direct Student Loans, although nine percent had to borrow from private lenders. Among graduates who borrowed the average student loan debt was less than \$26,000. The maximum they may borrow over four years from the Federal Direct Student Loan program is \$27,000.



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Curriculum

Binghamton offers [over 130 majors](#) as well [as more than 50 five-year Bachelor's/Masters programs](#). The university also offers Early Assurance Programs for early admission during the sophomore year into SUNY Upstate Medical University, Buffalo School of Medicine or Dental Medicine, and the SUNY College of Optometry as well as [an Early Acceptance program into the PharmD at the university's new pharmacy school](#).

Within the academic programs, there are some unique options including Leadership/Consulting and Quantitative Finance within the business school; Environmental Chemistry and Korean Studies within the Harpur College of Arts and Sciences and Materials Science and Engineering within the Watson School of Engineering and Applied Science. Also unusual for a state university: students in the liberal arts or business programs can choose a [General Engineering minor](#). The business and engineering programs are quite popular at Binghamton as are the majors in Biological Sciences, English and Psychology.

Binghamton's [general education requirements](#) are similar to other selective state universities, with three additional required subjects: Foreign Language (for all excluding Engineering), Aesthetics (Visual/Performing Arts) and Physical Education/Wellness. [Engineering students](#) have a four-course first-year sequence with two semesters of Engineering Communications, a first-semester Engineering Design course and a second-semester Engineering Analysis course.

Big classes will be the norm in most majors at Binghamton, even into the upper division classes. Thirteen percent of all courses taught in 2015-16 had more than 50 students; over half of these courses had more than 100. Forty-one percent had between 20 and 40. Forty-six percent had fewer than 20. A high student-faculty ratio (19 to 1) suggests that some of the more popular majors will have larger classes in the upper-division courses. But unlike other selective public universities, Binghamton does not place enrollment caps on any major.

Binghamton students gave their faculty a rating of 3.8 (out of a possible 5) on [RateMyProfessors.com](#). They held their faculty in higher regard than students at Rochester (3.7) and Syracuse (3.68), but also in similar regard to their peers at Cornell (3.77).

Community

Being a relatively new university—it has been at its current location since 1964—Binghamton campus does not have an “Old Main” or similar landmark historic building. As one contrast, most colleges feature a tall clock tower as a fixture in marketing materials. Binghamton does too, only the tower, atop the Union, is one of the newer structures on campus. This tower is also used in some versions of university's logo.

The Binghamton campus is settled into a hill. Residential buildings are situated above academic buildings in a tree-laden setting, through the academic buildings are not. The image for a student is much like walking from an apartment complex to a modern office park. [The major traffic circle, as seen from a map or aerial view, is shaped like the side](#)



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[profile of a human brain](#). It can also be thought to resemble butterfly wings when you add the routes around the Hinman and Mountainview residential college communities. Curvy roads not only enhance the feeling of a hilltop campus; they also help to slow cars down. With the completion of new residential college buildings, the Engineering and Science Center, the \$27 million Events Center, the renovated University Union and several sleek glass classroom and academic office buildings, there is an ongoing effort to create a strong visual identity and energy sustainability—aka “a green campus.”

There is also a 182 acre nature preserve on campus, of which 20 acres are wetlands. The preserve has numerous educational and recreational uses, including hiking trails and a wooden footbridge. Its habitats include hemlock forest, oak woodlands, a beaver pond, streams, wetlands, shrub-land, meadows and lichen-covered sites. The preserve is also the only campus space that is not Wi-Fi enabled.

The university is transparent about crime reporting compared with similar schools. There are four years of [Clery Reports](#) posted on its Web site. Some good news from the [current report](#): reported drug related arrests trended down each year from 120 in 2014 to 56 two years later. Within the residence halls they dropped from 56 to 33. However, alcohol-related disciplinary referrals, the most reported crime on college campuses, trended up from 200 in 2014 to 236 in 2016. Another concern: reported incidents of rape in the residence halls rose from only one in 2014 to 12 two years later. However, this could be the result of more students coming forward about such incidents.

Binghamton competes in 21 varsity sports at the NCAA Division I (scholarship) level. All excluding men’s golf, men’s tennis and wrestling are in the America East Conference. Binghamton is the only SUNY flagship campus that does not play football at the varsity level. However, it competes in more scholarship sports than any one of its three sister campuses in Albany, Buffalo or Stony Brook (Long Island) as well as Syracuse, a more “spirit and sports” oriented school that plays in a higher-profile ‘Power 5’ (Atlantic Coast) conference.

The campus does not border on a pedestrian-focused college downtown. Instead it borders a commercial highway with numerous chain shopping centers and restaurants that is accessible only by bus or car. Campus security works full-time at the main gate; the buildings are not immediately nearby. The university offers free bus transportation to students and continually redesigns the bus routes around student off-campus living patterns. A car is not really necessary at Binghamton, unless you have to do a large shopping spree at the supermarket. Freshmen are not allowed to have cars on campus.

The Binghamton area has very rough weather most of the year, including high rainfall and snow. Binghamton is located at the confluence of two rivers, the Susquehanna and the Chenango. Flooding is a common occurrence. While Binghamton is likened to “Rust Belt” communities that have lost industry and jobs, it also has many amenities one might find in a larger college community such as antique stores, a botanical garden, a performing arts center, a zoo and minor league hockey.



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Comforts

Residence halls are organized into five residential colleges—College-in-the-Woods, Dickinson, Hinman, Mountainview and Newing, each of which has its own community and recreational facilities. All, excluding Mountainview, offer substance-free floors. Dickinson hosts special interest housing, aka “pods,” in computers, robotics and engineering as well as the visual and performing arts. Other residential colleges offer special interest pods in economics, fitness, musical arts and pride and community. In the June prior to coming to campus, freshmen may be assigned to live in any residential college, excluding Mountainview.

The residential college setting promotes leadership and responsibility. Each college has its own student government which, in turn, is represented to the campus government. With faculty involvement, a residential college is more than a dorm club; it becomes an academic setting as well as a social one, and the residents have a say in school policy. Students receive not only tutoring; they can take classes in their college, too. After freshman year, students may change residential colleges; their assignment is partly based on the number of credits that the roommates or suite mates have accumulated. All residence halls are Wi-fi enabled.

The university owns three, four, six and eight-person on-campus apartments that offer spectacular hilltop views. However, these units are available to graduate students as well as upperclassmen. The rental market off campus is less expensive than it is for university-owned housing. It's very easy to find housing options online through a [Housing Registry](#) operated by the university. Rents can be as low as \$400/person/month plus utilities, a bargain in a university town.

[Greek life](#) attracts around 1,800 undergraduates. There are 51 recognized fraternities and sororities, more than you might expect to find at a selective school of this size. The university allows second-semester freshmen to pledge after they have earned a minimum of 12 credits with no less than a 2.5 GPA. There are seven governing councils: the Panhellenic Council, the Interfraternity Council, the National Pan-Hellenic Council, the Asian Greek Council, the Multicultural Greek and Fraternity Council, the Latino Greek Council and the Professional Fraternity Council. The university has also reported that there may be [five unrecognized fraternities and two unrecognized sororities](#) operating near campus.

Connections

If you're a New Yorker who wants to be an accountant, and you can get into Binghamton, go. The university is [the largest supplier of talent](#) to Price Waterhouse Coopers New York office among any school in New York State. Students in other majors should fare pretty well, too. While Binghamton is relatively small for a flagship state university, it has two career development offices, one for the [business school](#), the other for all other majors.

The campus is located within an hour from Cornell and Syracuse, making it easy for employers to recruit when they visit one or both of the other schools. The upcoming [Spring Job Fair](#) will attract more than 120 employers to campus, very good for a school



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of this size. [Employer site visits to New York City](#) are conducted in January. Motivated students should sign up for the [Passport to Career Services](#) program in their first year to consider their interests, plan their course choices and make connections. This program is a well organized four-year career plan.

Among the nearly 79,000 Binghamton alumni registered on [LinkedIn.com](#), over 35,000 are based in or around New York City, likely because most of them are from originally from the area. Over 9,900 alumni live in the Binghamton/Ithaca/Syracuse area aka Central New York. There are communities of over 2,000 alumni in and around Washington DC and Boston and more than 1,000 in and around San Francisco, Philadelphia and Los Angeles. This is quite good for a relatively new public university.

Conclusions

Binghamton appears to deliver on its academic promises. Much work has been done to improve the quality of student life and services on campus. It's not a "spirit and sports" school like Syracuse. But that is not why students choose to come and stay on to graduate.

Binghamton is not a geographically diverse school compared to other flagship state universities. However, it is an ethnically diverse community, given that New York is an ethnically diverse state. Binghamton is located in a region that has lost businesses and jobs. But the state is investing in the region's promise as a center for advancements in health care, including the establishment of a pharmacy school on this flagship campus.

It's going to be harder to get into Binghamton. From 2004 through 2016, Binghamton saw its applications rise from just over 20,000 to more than 32,000 while the number of freshmen rose from 2,200 to 2,600. With the launch of the Excelsior program as well as the attractive pricing for resident students, the university will attract more interest among New Yorkers. It's too hard to overlook the value as well as the opportunity to attend one of America's best public universities.

Report Card: Binghamton University

Four-Year/Six-Year Graduation Rates: A/A

Freshman Retention: A

Costs: A

Curriculum: A

Community: B+

Curriculum: A

Connections: A