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University of Pittsburgh

The University of Pittsburgh (Pitt) tries to combine the costs of a state school with the academic advantages of an urban research university. For the most part it succeeds at both.

Among urban research universities, public and private, Pitt is most similar to Boston University in terms of its offerings in Business, Education, Engineering, Health Professions and the liberal arts. Like Boston University, Pitt has approximately 18,000 undergraduates, though it is a more selective school, and a more expensive, school. A Pitt student, Pennsylvanian or not, who is interested in a major offered by both schools can realistically receive a similar educational, and city life experience as they might at Boston University. Pitt can also offer this experience at a school that has no less than 10,000 fewer undergraduates than Ohio State, UCLA, the University of Minnesota or the University of Washington, all more selective urban public universities.

Being in Pennsylvania, Pitt is cross-shopped quite often against Penn State's main campus. Both schools attract a statistically similar student, and both admit just over half of the prospective freshmen who. However, Pitt has a much smaller freshman class. Pitt also drew 40 percent of its class from outside of Pennsylvania. The incoming class will draw as much as 45 percent of its students from other states. Like Penn State, Pitt offers applicants the option to begin their education at regional campuses. But while Penn State has these campuses spread throughout Pennsylvania, Pitt concentrates them close to Pittsburgh.

Freshman Class of 2017	University of Pittsburgh	Penn State-University Park
Number of Freshman	4,123	9,210
SAT Middle 50%	1260-1400	1230-1410
ACT Composite Middle 50%	27-31	27-31

Both Pitt and Penn State offer an Honors College experience. However, Pitt, the smaller school, welcomes more honors students (650 vs [322](#)). Admissions to the University Honors College at Pitt are by invitation, though invited students must submit short essays. Admissions to the Schreyer Honors at Penn State are by application from any interested student. Overall, Pitt has between 2,100 and 2,200 students associated with the Honors College vs. between 1,800 and 1,900 at Penn State.

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 welcomes students in all majors.



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Another reason to seriously consider Pitt is the [Freshman Guarantee Programs](#). Students who are selected to these programs are assured admissions to the graduate or professional school, provided that they continue to make the proper academic progress required under the guarantee. Pitt extends these 18 programs not only to Masters degrees but also to its dental, law and medical schools. Pittsburgh is one of the better cities to take advantage of these programs; the city's job market is large enough to absorb students into clinical and internship positions as well as full-time jobs.

Pitt retained 92 percent of the students who entered the university in 2016, excellent for a state university. The four-year graduation rates in 2009 and 2010 were 64 and 65 percent, also excellent.

Costs

Pitt charges some of the highest in-state tuition and fees of any state-supported or state-related university in the United States. For 2017-18 they ranged from approximately \$18,100 for the Dietrich School to \$22,800 for those enrolled in the School 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 \$5,000 and \$12,000 respectively as they continue their degree program at that school. The Pharmacy students are considered to be graduate students, pursuing a PharmD, as they enter the fourth year of their education.

Non-resident tuition and fees ranged from approximately \$29,700 for the Dietrich School to \$37,800 for the College of Nursing. Room and board are estimated to be \$11,600, quite reasonable for a city university.

Students who graduated in 2016 who took out loans borrowed, on average, approximately \$36,600 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, as well as those who chose one of the other accelerated programs. 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 just over a third of its 2016 graduates who needed to borrow took out loans from sources other than the Federal Government. This is exceptionally high, considering that about 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 Deitrich School of Arts and Sciences instead. The school's [general education requirements](#) are quite similar to those in the



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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 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](#). Approximately 70 students graduate with this degree each year.

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



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tuition, they pay a 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.

Expect large classes at Pitt unless you are fortunate to be admitted to the Honors College or successfully receive approval to take honors courses. Nearly a fifth of Pitt's undergraduate classes offered in 2016-17 had more than 50 students, according to the university's 2017-18 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](#), a slightly higher rating (3.71) than students at Penn State-University Park gave their faculty. Pitt students held their faculty in about the same regard as students at nearby Carnegie Mellon (3.76) and in higher regard than students at the most similar urban private school, Boston University (3.70).

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 NHL's 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's 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 at 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 182 acres), does not



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feel as crowded as a school such as NYU. The university's signature building, the Cathedral of Learning is 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. 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 of the 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.

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). 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 Caeser's Pizza Bowl. However, they did upset Clemson, the eventual national champion, during the 2016 season. After a 16-year respite, Pitt and Penn State resumed their rivalry in 2016, restarting a home and away series that had begun in 1893.

Drug and alcohol-related arrests on campus trended upward from 2014 to 2016, according to the [university's crime report](#), although incidents of some sexually related crimes (Rape and Dating Violence) had trended down. The number of alcohol related arrests is fairly low, considering that over 7,000 undergraduates live on or near campus, including nearly all (97 percent) of the freshmen, and the university is in a major city .

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 dining, 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 better bet for freshman housing 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, named for a former Pitt and Steelers football coach. Holland Hall is dedicated to freshmen women. Nordenberg is the newest co-ed hall.



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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. However, Pitt accommodates a higher percentage of its students on-campus than Penn State-University Park (35 percent) as well as other urban public universities including Minnesota (22 percent), Ohio State (32 percent) and Washington (27 percent).

Pitt allows first-year students to rush fraternities and sororities. Just under 11 percent of the freshman men chose to join a fraternity. Across all undergraduates ten percent of the men are members of a fraternity while 12 percent of women are in sororities. 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, including utilities can be as low as \$400 according to the [university's off-campus housing directory](#). The university's off-campus housing office also provides an [online sublet service](#), something rarely seen at other schools.

Connections

Pitt offers exceptionally comprehensive [career services](#) as well as [a very large alumni base](#) with well over 300,000 members in more than 50 alumni clubs. It is exceptionally easy for ambitious students to network with alumni within the city as well as on campus. Ninety-four percent of the graduates in the Class of 2016 were either working full time or continuing their education full time within a year after they had received their degree.

Among the nearly 163,000 Pitt alumni registered on [LinkedIn.com](#), nearly 66,000 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, Los Angeles and Baltimore.

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



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Report Card: University of Pittsburgh

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