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California University of Pennsylvania

Located about an hour from downtown Pittsburgh, California University of Pennsylvania (CalU) is one of 14 schools in the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education. With approximately 5,500 undergraduates, the university is the largest, and probably the most important, college within the four counties immediately south of the Steel City: Fayette, Greene, Somerset, Washington and Westmoreland.

CalU is not exceptionally selective. Just over 2,900 students of the more than 3,200 students who applied to join the freshman class in 2016 were offered admission. The average GPA for the class of approximately 900 students was a 3.1. Nearly 45 percent of the class had a GPA of 3.25 or higher. The middle 50 percent of the entering class scored between 810 and 1030 on the SAT; the ACT scores ranged between 16 and 22. The university also welcomed nearly 700 transfer students. The Pennsylvania State System schools consider transfer applicants who have earned as few as 12 credits from a two-year or four-year college.

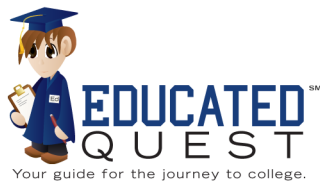
CalU has increasingly needed to recruit outside of its region. Three of the counties that have reliably supplied students (Somerset, Westmoreland and Washington) are expected to lose population, according to state government estimates, although Pennsylvania is expected to gain over 600,000 people by 2015. The admissions team has stepped up marketing efforts in Central Pennsylvania, around Harrisburg, as well as the Philadelphia metropolitan area to attract more prospective students. CalU also offers academic programs such as Golf Course Management and Mechatronics that appeal strongly to non residents and residents alike.

CalU faces strong competition from within Western Pennsylvania. Indiana University of Pennsylvania is the closest Pennsylvania State System school to the south of Pittsburgh, though its undergraduate student body is more than twice the size of CalU's. Applicants consider other State System universities in Western Pennsylvania including Clarion, Edinboro and Slippery Rock, all north of Pittsburgh. The University of Pittsburgh is a popular option for CalU applicants who want to move into the city. Penn State has a campus in Fayette County and the University of Pittsburgh has one in Greensburg. Private colleges nearby include Seton Hill University and Saint Vincent College.

CalU lost 28 percent of the freshmen who entered in 2015, up from 24 percent lost after each of the previous two years. Only 38 percent of the freshmen who entered in 2010 graduated on time. But the university also offers a [four-year commitment plan](#) that works well for students who are likely to remain in the same major, or transfer to a very similar one, by the last semester of their sophomore year. An impressive 87 percent of the students who signed commitments five or more years ago, and remained at CalU, graduated from the university within four years. Those who find a program that they like and connect well with faculty and advisors can have a very rewarding experience at this school.

Costs

This year CalU charged Pennsylvania residents approximately \$10,600 in tuition and fees and just over \$10,000 for room and board. Non-residents were charged approximately \$14,400.



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Within the Pennsylvania State System, [CalU undercut Indiana University of Pennsylvania's direct charges to residents who live on campus by more than \\$4,000.](#) The university is also less expensive for a Pennsylvania resident than [Clarion](#) and costs about the as [Slippery Rock](#). CalU offers [merit and need-based scholarships](#) to further reduce costs. Although 90 percent of CalU graduates in 2016 needed to take out loans to help cover the costs of their education, the average indebtedness among borrowers was approximately \$25,700. The maximum that these students could have borrowed through the Federal Direct Student Loan program to finish their education within four years was \$27,000.

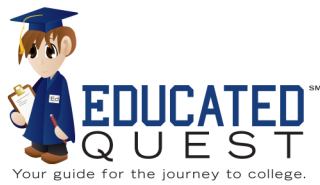
Curriculum

CalU offers [over 100 undergraduate degree programs](#), a huge variety for a school of its size, as well as many opportunities for minors and certificates. While the university was founded as a teacher's college, CalU also has standout programs in [Applied Engineering Technology](#), [Criminal Justice](#), [Environmental Studies](#), [Geography](#), [Sports Management](#) and [Technology Education and Management](#), among others. It is one of the two schools (Millersville is the other) in the Pennsylvania State System to offer a degree in [Meteorology](#). CalU also has a [small honors program](#) that offers dedicated residence hall space as well as honors courses, independent research and priority registration.

CalU may be an excellent option for students who are undecided about a major when they arrive in their freshman year, but have some ideas between two or three possible options among their offerings, for example Computer Science vs. one of the Applied Engineering Technology programs. The university has an [Exploratory Studies program](#) to help put undecided students into a better position to choose a major and graduate on time. CalU requires 40 credits of General Education courses of all students towards a 120-credit degree. Some could be filled through good course selection during the first two years that leaves a student on track and on time. Others that are less compatible with an intended major can wait.

CalU students will see some large classes, at least at the start. Among 886 undergraduate classes given during the 2016-17 academic year, 101 or 11 percent had over 50 students, though only two had more than 100. The university lists a student/faculty ratio of 19 to 1, more comparable to larger state universities than a mid-sized school. CalU has fewer faculty to teach the upper-division courses in the more popular majors than a school such as Indiana University of Pennsylvania or Pitt. During the 2016-17 academic year, 281 of 886 courses, almost a third of all classes offered at CalU, had between 30 and 40 students. By comparison, 25 percent of the undergraduate courses offered at Indiana University of Pennsylvania were this size.

CalU students gave their faculty a rating of 3.65 (out of a possible 5) on [RateMyProfessors.com](#), about the same rating that students at Slippery Rock University (3.66) students gave theirs. They rated their faculty lower than students at Clarion University (3.7), Edinboro University (3.71), Indiana University of Pennsylvania (3.75), Seton Hill University (3.81) and the University of Pittsburgh-Greensburg (3.72). But CalU students also held their faculty in higher regard than students at Saint Vincent College (3.57).



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Community

CalU takes good care of its campus. The university renovated its [student center](#) only two years ago and also upgraded the convocation center and athletic facilities. One science building is going through major renovations; another will be constructed after that. The only facility that appears to be dated in design is the university's library. The university allows all students to have cars, and parking, at the edge of campus is easy to find. The campus is about a 15 minute walk from end to end.

Downtown California offers Spuds, a mid-priced sandwich shop, a Subway and a Dairy Queen near campus, but little else besides gas stations. The town itself is small, with fewer than 7,000 residents, not including most of the students. The university tries to make up for the lack of amenities in the town by offering bus service into Pittsburgh as well as a full calendar of student activities and clubs and organizations. While there are plenty of dining and shopping opportunities in Washington County as well as Pittsburgh, students should add an E-Z Pass to their expenses if they bring a car to campus. PA 43, a well-maintained highway off Interstate 70, is also a toll road.

CalU competes in 16 varsity sports in NCAA Division II (scholarship) athletics. A member of the Pennsylvania State Athletic Conference, [CalU has won conference titles in football, softball, volleyball, women's basketball, women's golf, women's tennis since 2014](#). The Vulcans have also won [four NCAA Division II national championships, all in women's sports, the most recent coming in women's basketball in 2015](#). The football team averaged nearly [3,400 fans per game](#) when the won their conference title in 2016, according to the NCAA, [up over 1,000 on average from the season before. But attendance went down to 2,700 fans per game for 2017](#).

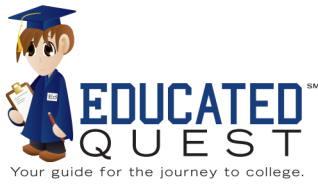
The university reported increased numbers of sexually related offenses in 2016 in its [2017 Clery Report](#), including five reported incidents of rape in the residence halls as well as six reported incidents of dating violence. Disciplinary referrals related to alcohol rose from 66 in 2014 to 96 the next year, and 142 the year after. Drug-related referrals doubled from 33 to 66, though arrests dropped from 35 in 2015 to 19 in 2016.

Comforts

CalU can house everyone who asks for on-campus housing. It offers some of the nicest [residence halls](#) that you will find on a college campus as well as living-learning and honors communities. All of the living options in the residence halls are suite style. But the numbers of bedrooms, single or double, that share a common bathroom vary, depending on the living option selected. University-owned apartment-style housing is also available in [Vulcan Village](#) immediately off campus. It makes no sense to live in non-university housing and be bound to a 12-month lease. Greek social life is relatively unimportant at CalU, accounting for only five percent of the undergraduate men and five percent of the women.

Connections

CalU offers students a choice between internship or co-op for all degree programs. University-sponsored internships are typically credit-bearing and unpaid. CalU even offers [a scholarship program for area residents that can enable them to accept an internship outside of Pennsylvania](#).



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Co-op is paid employment over more hours, but carries no degree credit. Many other schools ask their co-op students to work full time, but CalU offers part-time and full-time positions. A student from Southwestern Pennsylvania may benefit the most from co-op. Juggling work and the class schedule, s/he can carry the co-op during the school year, then continue it full time during the summer.

Among the nearly 28,000 CalU alumni registered on [LinkedIn.com](https://www.linkedin.com), approximately half are based in or around the Pittsburgh area, but the base really drops from there. The Philadelphia area ranks second with just over 1,200 alumni, then Washington DC with just over 950.

Conclusions

CalU is a great public option for students who are familiar with the Pittsburgh area, but do not want to go to college in the city. The university does all it can to accommodate its students on campus academically, experientially, residentially and socially, at a very reasonable price. It's hard to ask a mid-sized state university to do more on its campus, especially when it comes to housing and experiential learning.

A car is strongly recommended for those who want to work in co-ops or internships and to take better advantage of dining, entertainment and shopping opportunities beyond California, Pennsylvania. The car might add to a student's costs. But CalU will still cost less than going to college in Pittsburgh and having to do without one.

Report Card: California University of Pennsylvania

- Four-Year/Six-Year Graduation Rates: C/C
- Freshman Retention: C
- Costs: A
- Curriculum: A
- Community: B
- Comforts: A
- Connections: B (Pittsburgh area)/C (Elsewhere)