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Landmark College (VT)

Landmark College advertises itself as a college of choice for students who learn differently. The college specializes in working with students who have diagnosed learning difficulties, including, but not limited exclusively to, ADD, ADHD and autism. Other colleges, notably Curry College (MA) and Lynn University (FL), have also made major investments to support these students, but only Landmark and Beacon College (FL) specialize in educating them.

Landmark is more than just a small college with a campus near the Vermont/New Hampshire border. It offers [online education to high school students](#), [transitional “bridge programs” for recent high school graduates](#), a [semester exchange program](#), [training for academics and professionals who work with similar students at other colleges](#) as well as [Associates and Bachelors degrees](#). The most common path is to pursue an Associates degree, or a transitional program, then move on to a more conventional four-year college.

According to the college’s academic materials, only 35 percent of the students who attend more conventional college and qualify for learning accommodations, such as note takers, special computer-based tools or additional time for tests, actually request them. Landmark goes in the opposite direction, encouraging students to ask for help and guiding them to better organize themselves and develop study habits that will help them to become more successful at college-level work. At Landmark, those who learn differently are the mainstream.

Founded in 1983 in Prides Cross, Massachusetts, Landmark acquired its main campus in Putney, Vermont in 1985 from Windham College, a school that decided to close seven years before. [The original red brick campus was designed in 1960 by Edward Durell Stone](#), the architect who is credited with the design of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington DC, the headquarters for the National Geographic Society, Harvey Mudd College (CA), and the main campus of the State University of New York at Albany. The buildings constructed since 1985 follow the design theme of the original structures. Landmark’s setting is as secluded as a college campus can get while still remaining open, with no main gates.

It makes no sense to discuss admissions statistics for Landmark. The school evaluates candidates not only on their academic record but also the extent of where the learning difficulties appear on the spectrum. Landmark admits students it believes that it may be able to educate and help, willing to accept



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accommodations and learn how to learn using the college's methods and programs. While the college teaches students how to learn, the academic instruction is also designed to remind them that they are not in high school anymore. From the presentations that I heard, it appears common for students to fail and repeat courses at Landmark.

The likely options versus Landmark are a more conventional two-year or four-year college, or possibly no college at all. In addition, Landmark has granted very few bachelor's degrees to date. According to data found in College Navigator, Beacon College (FL), possibly a similar school, is actually smaller (just under 350 students), and grants about 40 bachelor's degrees in a year.

Is it better to be a transitional student or Associates degree candidate than to stay four years to pursue a Bachelor's degree?

I met two types of students at Landmark: those who arrived from high school, and those who transferred after a bad experience at another college. They had three choices: earn an Associates degree, earn credits and learning skills but leave without a degree, or remain on campus for four years and graduate with a Bachelors.

Landmark grants Bachelors degrees in subjects that are the more natural spin-offs from the core that they take in the first year, including a course called Perspectives in Learning. Learning to learn involves developing oral, written and interpersonal communications skills, computer skills as well as an understanding of concepts in Biology, Education and Psychology. These subjects along with Communications and Computer Science, are natural areas to offer majors for Bachelors degrees. More recently, it has tried to complement the academic program with business courses to help students understand general business management, economics and entrepreneurship. The campus setting also lends itself well to Environmental Science and Environmental Studies.

It will be difficult and quite expensive for the college to add more majors when it has room for only 500 students, and must also train new faculty to work with a differently abled student population. It might be better for Landmark to partner with other colleges to find the best possible transfer pathways into the majors that it cannot offer. Landmark combines career development and transfer advising under a single office which is already capable of finding such partnerships.



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Do the learning tools and methods work?

I have no college-level training in Education or Psychology, so I have to trust the experts who work at Landmark. They not only work with the students; they have also developed a very large body of research for a very small and relatively new college.

Landmark teaches students how to self-advocate, even though the faculty is more aware of every student's difficulties than practically any conversational college faculty would be. Most students who enter a more conventional college, and do not seek accommodations, also do not learn how to self advocate. They are less likely to succeed in a competitive classroom setting without assistance from anyone who may help them to self advocate or learn college-level material.

There were not many faculty reviews of Landmark professors on RateMyProfessors.com. But the students gave the faculty a rating of 4.03 (out of a possible 5), quite good for any college of any size.

Is this the right campus setting for the students who live on campus?

Personalized services are easier to deliver when everyone is close by. Putney and Brattleboro, less than ten miles away, are more suited towards fall foliage tourism than they are as a college community. The more isolated setting might help new students to bond on campus and concentrate on schoolwork with fewer outside distractions. But I also wondered: the longer you stay, the more restless you might become, unless you found your outlets through the academics or student activities. Landmark's first-year retention is good (90% for 2016-17), but over half of the students who arrive leave to go elsewhere.

Landmark teaches "social pragmatics," letting students know, for example, which behaviors, comments and gestures are socially unacceptable on or off-campus, how to address or suppress them, and understand how to deal with taunting, teasing or nasty jokes. I understand the necessity: your classmates, floor mates and roommate may need your help in adjusting to college life, and you may need theirs, too. The college's administrators and professional staff would also want to help make sure that Landmark students were neither ridiculed nor shunned in the surrounding community. The instruction is an excellent idea—it should be developed for use among students at more conventional colleges, given political climates on campuses today.



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The campus itself is well lit and easy for campus police to secure. There were few incidents of crime in the school's [Clery Report](#), though it also reported six incidents of sexual assault (fondling) for 2017 and well as incidents of non-statutory rape in each year from 2015 through 2017. Like any other college, alcohol-related disciplinary referrals were by far the most reported criminal incidents. When the college had the option of subjecting the student to arrest vs. a disciplinary action, it chose disciplinary action.

Can Landmark further reduce its costs towards a degree?

When a family wants more services to help their child, including a 2 to 1 student/faculty ratio, they also need to pay for them. The costs of delivering and improving upon those services will only increase over time.

In 2016-17 there were 361 Landmark students—78 percent of the student body—who qualified for scholarships. They received an average award of approximately \$22,900, according to data that I found on College Navigator. This represented 43 percent of the tuition and fees (\$52,650) that the college charged that year. Less than 40 percent of the students borrowed to cover the costs of their education, which means that the majority did not.

Will Landmark graduates find work after college?

Over 80 percent of recent Landmark graduates who seek employment found work related to their major. This is impressive because most of the students do not come from Vermont though they might hail from Connecticut, Massachusetts or New York, or elsewhere.

Landmark has developed a successful partnership with Hasbro in Rhode Island where students may work as brand writers and computer programmers, among other internship programs with partner employers. Given the college's small student body on campus, it might make more sense for Landmark to add more employer partnerships versus adding majors. This can become a strong advantage versus a more conventional college that might accommodate differently abled students, but not offer as much assistance to them in job matching and interview skills.

Any suggestions for families?

If I was a parent who could afford the total costs of a Landmark education, today in excess of \$70,000, I would ask an educational psychologist who understands



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the college's educational model to help in the college search, to evaluate my child in the same way as the college admissions office to see if there is an educational fit.

I would also consult a financial planner. Families who send their children to Landmark may find out that there are [medical tax benefits](#) to choosing this school over others. In addition, families might also want to contact their state vocational rehabilitation offices who can/will offer financial assistance and/or technological materials to aid in success.

No parent should "drop off" their child at Landmark, or any other college, without doing thorough research and maintaining a dialogue with the school after their child is enrolled.

I would like to thank my friend, and fellow admissions advisor, Jodi Rosenshein Atkin, for reviewing this profile. Based in the Rochester NY area, Jodi has a BA and MA in Psychology from the University of Rochester as well as over 20 years in clinical and educational settings, including considerable experience with students who learn differently. Contact Jodi at jodiratkin@gmail.com.