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### Ursinus College (PA)

One of America's Colleges That Change Lives, Ursinus College is located less than an hour's drive by car from Philadelphia. This 1,500 student liberal arts school grants only bachelors degrees, the more popular programs being in the Biological Sciences and Business.

Ursinus is not exceptionally selective, but it does a good job in working with the students the college attracts versus other test-optional schools that they were most likely to consider. Like all of these schools below, it has a chapter of Phi Beta Kappa, the national academic honor society. This is important because the faculty nominates the school for the honors. Approval to have a Phi Beta Kappa chapter is a very positive reflection on the rigor of the academics as well as the quality of the students and faculty. This is especially helpful for students who intend to go on to further education.

School Name	Acceptance Rate (Class entering in 2017)	SAT Middle 50% (Class entering in 2017)	Freshman Retention (Class entering in 2016)	Four-Year Graduation Rate (Class entering in 2011)	Number of undergrads in 2016-17
<b>Ursinus College</b>	78%	1110-1310	87%	75%	1,500
Dickinson College (PA)	49%	1230-1420	91%	80%	2,400
Franklin and Marshall College (PA)	34%	1260-1420	92%	78% (2012)	2,300
Gettysburg College (PA)	46%	1270-1410	90%	79%	2,400
Muhlenberg College (PA)	48%	1140-1340	91%	84%	2,400
Washington College (MD)	47%	1090-1300	85%	73%	1,500

Ursinus is also like its Pennsylvania sports rivals in terms of the interest in sports and Greek life although a higher percentage (nearly 40 percent) of its students are varsity athletes. But unlike these schools, it draws a far higher share of its students from within Pennsylvania or Washington College, also a sports rival, draws from Maryland.



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School Name	% of students from in-state	# of varsity sports	% men in fraternities	% women in sororities
<b>Ursinus College</b>	60%	25	18%	32%
Dickinson College (PA)	21%	24	16%	27%
Franklin and Marshall College (PA)	30%	29	20%	26%
Gettysburg College (PA)	26%	24	32%	35%
Muhlenberg College (PA)	29%	22	17%	21%
Washington College (MD)	45%	17	15%	17%

Ursinus fares quite well versus more selective schools that have greater resources as well as stronger national brand recognition when it comes to retaining and graduating a freshman class. This is impressive given that Ursinus is less selective, and likely lesser known. Recognition as one of the Colleges That Change Lives likely helps within Pennsylvania, which has two other such schools (Allegheny and Juniata) that are in even more isolated locations than Ursinus, and it might help within New Jersey, which has none.

But the numbers also raise long term concerns. Ursinus' future cannot be tied to attracting so much of its freshman class from Pennsylvania, a state [which is not expected to produce many more high school graduates over the next six years](#) or New Jersey, where the numbers are expected to decline. They also show that Ursinus appears to be trying to offer a varsity sports program at the same level as other schools with more students and resources as well as Greek social life. That will be very expensive for the college to sustain.

### Costs

Ursinus estimates a total cost of attendance—tuition, fees, room and board, and essentials of just over \$68,000. Only the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is required to be considered for need-based aid.

The college also attempts to reduce students costs through some relatively generous merit scholarships that schools such as Franklin and Marshall do not offer, and that other colleges such as Dickinson, Gettysburg and Muhlenberg cannot match.

The college advertised on its Web site that [36 percent of this year's incoming freshman class received Gateway Scholarships; this term they are valued at \\$35,000 per year, approximately two-thirds of tuition and fees. Larger \(\\$40,000/year\) and smaller \(\\$21,000 to \\$30,000/year\) merit awards are also granted.](#) The college requires a GPA of only 2.0



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to renew these awards. There is also a [creative writing award named for alumnus JD Salinger, author of The Catcher In the Rye, in the amount of \\$40,000/year](#) as well as the opportunity to live in the dorm room that Salinger occupied in college. Ursinus also participates in the [Bonner Leaders program](#) where students may receive a \$4,000 annual award that is connected not only to academic performance, but also community service.

The more generous merit awards make Ursinus cost competitive with the resident charges for a full-pay student at the larger state-related schools in Pennsylvania (Penn State-University Park, Temple University and the University of Pittsburgh), Rutgers-New Brunswick or The College of New Jersey. The college is an excellent position to recruit these students, when they find those who would prefer to attend a smaller school.

However, on average, the college met 84 percent of need for the students deemed qualified for need-based aid. Merit awards might have filled part of the need for some. The neediest students from Pennsylvania are the easiest to aid to full need, if they qualify for state scholarships as well as Federal Pell Grants. For others the task is harder. There is less money available for institutional gift aid. Ursinus' endowment in Fiscal Year 2017 was approximately \$130 million, according to the National Association of College and University Business Officers. Even Washington College, which has about the same number of undergraduates as Ursinus, had an endowment of over \$200 million.

While merit awards reach far into a freshman class, Ursinus students who granted last year and had to borrow towards the cost of their education owed, on average, just over \$39,000, according to the Project on Student Debt. This amount is high considering that the maximum that undergraduates may borrow through the Federal Direct Student Loan program over four years is \$27,000.

## Curriculum

Ursinus imposes fairly light [core requirements](#) on all students. The core is designed around helping students to answer these questions:

- What should matter to me?
- How should we live together?
- How can we understand the world?
- What will I do?

Everyone must take a year of college-level foreign language through either advancement in the language studied in high school, or by taking introductory courses in a new language. Everyone must also take on an [Independent Learning Experience](#) and complete a senior capstone project. Ursinus makes it relatively easy for students to use courses to fulfill core requirements as well as complete a second major or minor(s).

All Ursinus freshmen must also take a two-semester [Common Intellectual Experience \(CIE\)](#) course taught by faculty who might come from any academic department. Limited to 16 students per section, CIE uses classical and modern works from philosophy, literature, science and history as a guide to teach critical listening reading, writing and



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thinking skills. CIE might be the hardest pair of courses that most Ursinus students take . But it helps each student advance into upper-level academic work better than an introductory expository writing course or a larger set of general education requirements.

Ursinus offers more than twice the number of [academic programs](#) that would be expected for a school this small. Some that you are less likely to find at other liberal arts colleges include Applied Economics, Biostatistics, Health and Exercise Physiology, Human Performance Studies, Peace and Justice Studies, Museum Studies and Scientific Computing. The most popular programs are in the Biological Sciences and business subjects. The make spaces, collaborative learning rooms and laboratory facilities in the recently opened [Innovation and Discovery Center](#) *actually support both within the very same building.*

You are not likely to have a class with over 40 students at Ursinus, even in the introductory courses that are required for several majors such as Biology, Economics or Psychology, but the CIE course requires attendance at campus programs that are shared among more than one section. More than two-thirds of all classes offered at Ursinus had fewer than 20 students.

Ursinus students gave their faculty a rating of 3.87 (out of a possible 5) on [RateMyProfessors.com](#). They held their faculty in higher regard than students at Dickinson (3.8), Gettysburg (3.7) and Muhlenberg (3.72) and in about the same regard as their peers at Franklin and Marshall (3.86).

### Community

Ursinus' well maintained 170 acre campus can be navigated from end to end within ten minutes. Unlike, for example, Franklin and Marshall where buildings are designed around an 18th century colonial theme, [the mix of buildings on the Ursinus campus could be considered eclectic](#). The newest buildings, such as the [Kaleidoscope Performing Arts Center](#) and the recently opened [Innovation and Discovery Center](#) were designed around their intended uses, and look nothing alike, though various "pop art" sculptures and green spaces tie the place together nicely. The college also renovated it's dining spaces. It plans to open the Commons, [its new student center, admissions building and bookstore off the main entrance to campus next year.](#)

Like its more selective sports rivals, Ursinus' campus is located within a small town where the college is a major employer. While there is a diner and other inexpensive eating places within walking distance, there is little reason to walk to them when the campus dining services provide similar meals. Access to a car is necessary to go to shopping centers that are only a ten-minute drive from campus, to the larger King off Prussia Mall 20 minutes away, or to travel into Philadelphia. Parking is not as much of a problem at Ursinus as it is at the other liberal arts schools that its students might have considered.

Nearly 40 percent of Ursinus students are also varsity athletes. Students are more likely to cheer for their fellow students at the smaller school than they would at a larger one; they are more likely to know, and possibly befriend, the athletes among them. Ursinus



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has had recent successes in the women's sports including field hockey, soccer and swimming.

The Ursinus campus is relatively safe according to the college's [most recent Clery Report](#), but there were more than 100 reported alcohol-related disciplinary actions each year from 2015 through 2017. There were 41 actual arrests related to liquor law violations in 2015. That trended down to 24 in each of the next two years, There were also 86 reported drug-related disciplinary referrals in 2015, dropping to 37 two years later, and 20 drug-related arrests in 2015, dropping to only one two years later. Reported incidents of other crimes, especially burglaries, also trended down.

### Comforts

The college reports that [97 percent of all students live on campus. Housing is guaranteed for four years.](#) First-year students are more likely to live in one of the older traditional-style halls with double rooms, several sharing a common bathroom. Sophomores, juniors and seniors may also opt for [suite-style halls, one of 32 Main Street houses or special interest housing.](#) The Main Street houses have full kitchens, the other living options will require a larger [meal plan](#). Fraternities and sororities do not own their own housing. They may opt to live together, but may also opt to live with non-members.

### Connections

Ursinus has over 6,000 alumni in the Philadelphia area registered in [LinkedIn.com](#), a large group for a fairly small college. There are also more than 1,000 alumni in and around New York City. Beyond that the base gets really thin. Ursinus is a far more regional school versus its Dickinson, Franklin & Marshall, Gettysburg and Muhlenberg when it comes to having connections in the Baltimore-Washington Corridor or the Boston area. But the college also reports that 93 percent of the class that graduated last year found full-time work, was attending graduate or professional school, or engaged in service.

Students may build a resume that combines academics and career development in several ways including the [Independent Learning Experiences](#) (required for the degree) the [U-Imagine Center for Integrative and Entrepreneurial Studies](#), [research opportunities](#) and [study-away in Philadelphia](#) and [Washington DC](#) among others. These opportunities are as impressive as those at the larger liberal arts colleges that Ursinus students had considered. There is also less competition to get into these programs because there are fewer students.

### Conclusions

There is a lot to like about Ursinus, especially for students who can either afford the school, or qualify for one of the more generous merit awards.

Ursinus provides as rigorous a liberal arts education as they will find at much more selective schools. This college delivers very similar results for its students and alumni. Its best to take advantage of the research, service, study abroad and study away programs to get the full measure of an Ursinus education.



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If the campus or the immediately surrounding community had direct bus or rail access to Philadelphia, admissions to Ursinus would be as competitive as they are to schools such as Dickinson, Franklin and Marshall, Gettysburg or Muhlenberg. The college would attract a more national student body who could help the college build a more national alumni base.

Then again, Ursinus is one of the Colleges That Change Lives for many good reasons—and selectivity is not one of them. A very good college with achievable admissions is rare. Ursinus tries harder than most to remain that way.

### **Report Card: Ursinus College**

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