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Wilkes University (PA)

Located in Wilkes-Barre, in Northeastern Pennsylvania, Wilkes is a small university with 2,500 undergraduates and more than 3,000 graduate students within [six schools](#). Wilkes is the only school in this region that grants a PharmD. and offers a [Pre-Pharmacy Guaranteed Seat to freshmen](#) and offers a very comprehensive selection of business, communications, nursing and engineering programs.

Across all academic programs, Wilkes is not an extremely selective school. Seventy-five percent of applicants to last year's freshman class were offered admission, although admissions to the Nursing program (3.3 GPA/1020 SAT minimum), Engineering (570 Math SAT minimum) and Pharmacy will be more competitive. The average SAT for the class that entered last fall was an 1120.

Unique among private universities within Pennsylvania, over half of the Wilkes entering freshmen are first-generation college students. Wilkes offers "Edge" programs where students may enter with a reduced course load, and receive additional academic advising, with financial aid covering the additional time that might be required to enter a major or complete a degree. This school is more willing than most to take a chance on a student's potential, even for the more competitive majors. Student who enter the Edge programs will be able to graduate on-time, to close to it, in the majors, outside of the engineering and the health professions which have demanding science and departmental requirements in the freshman and sophomore years.

Wilkes retained 77 percent of the class that arrived last year. While better than average for colleges across the country, the university's freshman retention rate was lower than the those of the University of Scranton (88 percent), Marywood University (86 percent) and Misericordia University (83 percent) but slightly better than King's College (74%). Wilkes four-year graduation rate, while better than the Pennsylvania State System schools, was 47 percent for the class that arrived in 2011. Sixty percent of the students who entered that year, including those who remained for an advanced degree, finished in six.

Students who consider Wilkes are also looking at the Penn State and Pennsylvania State System campuses in the Pocono Valley region (Bloomsburg, East Stroudsburg, Kutztown, Lock Haven) as well as private schools that offer special degrees. Students interested in Pharmacy, for example, may also be considering the University of the Sciences and Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia or Duquesne University in Pittsburgh. Those interested in Nursing might also be considering Kings College, Marywood University, Misericordia University or University of Scranton. There is some overlap in academic programs between Wilkes and Kings, which are in the same town. However, Kings, like Marywood, Misericordia and Scranton, is a religiously affiliated school while Wilkes is independent.

Other schools outside of Pennsylvania that are similar to Wilkes in terms of student body size and scope of the academic programs are Fairleigh Dickinson University (NJ) and Western New England University (MA).

Costs

When it comes to releasing [information on the true total cost of attendance](#), Wilkes is quite transparent. The total estimate for 2018-19 is approximately \$55,600, including direct and indirect costs. This total is quite close to the non-resident costs for state universities in the neighboring states of Delaware, Maryland and New Jersey as well as those for non-residents who consider Penn State-University Park, the University of Pittsburgh and Temple University.



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Wilkes further reduces costs through [renewable scholarships](#) ranging from \$13,000 to \$19,000 per year, with an additional \$2,000 tacked on for students who come from outside Pennsylvania. The larger awards make the school quite competitive on price for a student who might otherwise choose a larger state school.

Wilkes reported a rather high (\$47,600) average level of indebtedness to the Project on Student Debt for the students in the Class of 2017 who took out loans. However, this also includes the PharmD students who had spent six years in school, and were assessed graduate-level tuition and fees as well as students who pursued other dual-degree programs at the university.

Curriculum

Wilkes requires [37 credits of core courses](#), regardless of a student's major, though some of them may be applied toward the major field or a minor as well. The difference is that the [actual core courses](#) are listed for the humanities, natural sciences, social sciences and the visual and performing arts. The selection within these each of these areas is fairly limited.

While the majority of Wilkes majors are pre-professional, there are fewer than 20 that are also likely to be offered at a liberal arts college. Economics, a major at most schools, is available only as a minor at Wilkes, and Spanish is the only foreign language that is available as either a major or minor. However, there are also applied options, including Public Administration and Policy Studies within [Political Science](#) and in Telecommunications and Journalism within [Communications Studies](#), among other choices. The university opened a new media center this year, and also supports a student-run public relations firm. Wilkes also offers a unique five-year [BA in Psychology/MBA in Industrial Psychology](#) program for those who would like to apply psychology into a business career.

The most popular majors at Wilkes are [Biology](#), [Engineering](#), [Nursing](#) and [Pharmacy](#), also among the most competitive programs for admission to the university. The pharmacy school, which opened in 1996, is one of the newest in the country. The business school is also fairly new, opening in 2004.

You will see some larger classes at Wilkes in the introductory courses that could have 50 to 75 students, but over half of all classes have fewer than 20. Wilkes students gave their faculty a 3.71 (out of a possible 5) on [RateMyProfessors.com](#), a higher rating than students at the most similar schools (Fairleigh Dickinson at Florham-Madison and Western New England) gave their faculty, similar to ratings given by students at King's (3.73). They held their faculty in higher regard than students at Misericordia (3.67), the Bloomsbury (3.63), University of the Sciences (3.54) and Duquesne (3.67). But they also held them in lower regard than students at Marywood (3.8) and Scranton (3.88) as well as Kutztown (3.75), East Stroudsburg (3.76) and Lock Haven (3.77).

Community

Wilkes has invested over \$100 million to renovate buildings and create a more connected residential campus within a small (35 acre) area. [The major academic buildings and the Henry Student Center opened after 2000 as did the campus art gallery.](#) You can walk this campus, including parking and athletic fields, from end to end in less than 15 minutes.

The immediate area around the campus is more urban, but also stable. A multiplex theatre is within easy walking distance as are casual dining and drinking options. There is also a strong Jewish community around the campus. However, there are rough areas as you drive in any direction away from the campus, and these influence the reported numbers of incidents of property crimes (Larceny/Theft) and Assaults in the university's most recent [Clery Report](#). This is



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one school where it is best to have a car if you want to get to attractions such as Montage Mountain or nearby shopping centers. Mass transit will be more limited than it is in a larger city such as Philadelphia or Pittsburgh.

Wilkes competes in 23 varsity scholarship sports, including football. With football in the mix, about a third of the student body are varsity athletes, high for any college of any size, especially for a school with so many demanding majors. But while a good share of the students are athletes, there is no fraternity or sorority life on campus.

Comforts

While the undergraduate student body is small for a university that offers so many pre-professional programs, the university accommodates about half of its undergraduates in on-campus housing, and keeps the parking close by.

[Students have a choice of living in converted mansions or traditional residence halls for their freshman year. Sophomores, juniors and seniors have apartment and suite-style options.](#) Since the neighborhood around campus is nicer than the areas that you drive through to get there, on-campus living makes more sense than an off-campus house or apartment.

Connections

Being a relatively small university that is relatively new—it grew from its beginnings as Bucknell's junior college from 1933 through 1947—Wilkes does not have many alumni. But this will change as the university expands its graduate programs, which draw from the Northeastern Pennsylvania labor market. But the good news is that most of the alumni community is already near campus for workshops, recruiting, and other career events. Wilkes has three large alumni communities registered in LinkedIn.com: Eastern Pennsylvania from Allentown, moving west to Scranton (over 6,800 alumni), New York (over 2,000) and Philadelphia (about 2,000). Beyond that the base gets thin.

[Northeastern Pennsylvania](#) is a region of over 1 million residents; its major industries are health care, manufacturing and tourism. The region job market in the region is large enough to absorb college students as interns, part-time employees and entry-level hires, mainly because the colleges in the area are small. While the University of Scranton, the largest, has around 3,600 undergraduates, Wilkes has the second-largest population, and places more emphasis on pre-professional programs, even with the liberal arts degrees, and also has more graduate students. The housing market is more affordable than the larger cities, New York and Philadelphia, and they are not too far away.

In addition to [individualized career services and career fairs](#), Wilkes offers a [one-credit career development course to juniors and seniors](#). Student may take either [three or six credits in a semester for internships](#), depending on their academic program. Wilkes also offers a [cooperative education program](#) for students who major in mechanical engineering, electrical engineering, and engineering management. The university also offers the [Bierley Fellowship](#), a competitive awards program where juniors and seniors may seek grants between \$500 and \$5,000 to support costs for internships, study abroad or research projects.

Conclusions

Wilkes may be an attractive alternative for a student who is serious about a pre-professional program but would otherwise be attending a state school that has larger classes and more competition in the classroom. The university offers several high demand majors, as larger schools



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do, but will offer more attention to the students who are willing to do the work, and offers some fairly generous scholarships to help. But students will need a car, or at least access to one, to get around

There is always a demand for a school such as Wilkes, especially in a region that is trying to keep college graduates around after graduation. Given the ambitious investments in the campus, the academic programs and education for first-generation college students, it appears that the university's leadership knows this well.

Report Card: Wilkes University

- Four-Year/Six Year Graduation Rates: C/C
- Freshman Retention: C
- Costs: B+
- Curriculum: A
- Community: B
- Comforts: B
- Connections: A (Northeastern Pennsylvania)/B (New York and Philadelphia)/C (elsewhere)