



RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES VS LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES

Many students don't fully understand the difference between research universities and liberal arts colleges. The greatest difference is that professors at **research universities** are typically focused on research instead of on teaching (thus the phrase "publish or perish"). Often, graduate students teach in place of professors, and many classes are large and lecture-style. Students typically live off-campus for at least half of their time at college. Students who want the sports spirit of a large university but who also want to get to know their professors may find that honors colleges make a big university feel smaller. Research opportunities abound at these universities, but be sure to check whether undergrads have access; many times, graduate students have first dibs at research opportunities. And be sure to note the graduation rates at these big universities; 4 year rates are often 50-60%. It may be hard to get the classes you need to graduate in four years.

On the other hand, professors at **liberal arts colleges** typically are fully dedicated to teaching and make a concerted effort to build relationships with their students. Because most liberal arts colleges are focused solely on undergrads, there are no graduate students around to teach classes. Students end up living on campus much of the time (housing for upperclassmen is often apartment style). Don't think that liberal arts colleges don't offer research opportunities. Many offer robust and sometimes personalized opportunities that are solely for undergrads, and many are committed to growing research opportunities as demand continues to rise. 4 year graduation rates are typically 85-90%. While they may not have the big rah-rah spirit of larger universities, liberal arts colleges are known to have vibrant, tight-knit, and supportive communities.

COLLEGE IN THE SPOTLIGHT: BRYN MAWR COLLEGE

- Location: Bryn Mawr, PA
- # of Undergrads: 1,297
- Acceptance Rate: 38%
- Student / Faculty Ratio: 8:1
- Returning Freshmen: 87%
- % Receiving Merit Aid: 43%

INTERESTING FACTS:

- All womens college that's a 20 minute train ride away from Philly
- Diverse, intellectual, community-oriented, politically minded student body
- Campus has a strict honor code with long-standing traditions, yet students are highly individualistic and fiercely independent
- Gen ed requirements include critical thinking seminar, quantitative work, foreign language, and PE (including passing a swimming test)
- Growth and Structure of Cities major is unique and interdisciplinary
- Students can take classes (and major/minor) at nearby Haverford or at Swarthmore or Penn
- Quality of teaching is incredibly high, and professors are truly accessible
- 92% live on campus in Hogwarts-like dorms.

COLLEGE IN THE SPOTLIGHT: HAVERFORD COLLEGE

- Location: Haverford, PA
- # of Undergrads: 1,298
- Acceptance Rate: 18%
- Student / Faculty Ratio: 9:1
- Returning Freshmen: 88%
- % Receiving Merit Aid: 0%

INTERESTING FACTS:

- Overarching honor code derived from its Quaker heritage drives campus culture; students schedule their own exams, take unproctored tests, and police underage drinking; students share values of trust and respect
- Sizeable workload, but atmosphere is supportive
- Free shuttle connects campus with Bryn Mawr, and students share classes, a newspaper, radio station, and clubs and sports
- Small classes with structures for constant advising
- 40% of professors live on campus
- Freshman housing is considered best anywhere
- Social life is campus based; party scene is "chill" and pressure-free.

KEY RESOURCES FOR JUNIORS WHO ARE EXPLORING COLLEGES:

Besides the must-have "Fiske Guide to Colleges," there are several other resources that are incredibly helpful for learning more about colleges. They include:

- **College Navigator.** My favorite search engine. Search on majors, geographic areas, selectivity, etc. Find college-level data on such things as net price, popular programs and majors, graduation rates, and campus safety.
- **Collegexpress.** Go to <https://www.collegexpress.com/lists/> to see a multitude of lists of colleges (eg, colleges on the trimester system, large universities that feel small, colleges especially welcoming to freshmen).
- **Common Data Set.** One of the most useful resources on the internet is the Common Data Set (CDS). The Common Data Set is a compilation of standards and data points as defined by the US Department of Education, and most every college posts their Common Data Set data on their website, typically under their Institutional Research page. The easiest way to find the CDS is to Google "Common Data Set + Bard" (or whichever college you're looking at).

The CDS includes a huge amount of data, such as:

- How many students apply and are accepted
 - Test data and GPA data for enrolled students
 - How many of the accepted students applied test optional
 - How many are invited to be on a waitlist and then accepted
 - How important certain admissions criteria are
 - How many receive need-based and merit aid
- **Colleges That Change Lives (www.ctcl.org).** Many students these days are seeking colleges where they can get to know their professors, have meaningful, engaging opportunities, and feel a real sense of community. The 40 Colleges That Change Lives often fit these needs incredibly well. You may not have heard of them, and they may be smaller than you think you want, but they are definitely worth a close look!
 - The **U.S. College and University Reference Map** is a very useful tool to help families plan and schedule college visits. Over 1,400 colleges are plotted on a map. Go to Amazon to purchase.

REMINDERS FOR SENIORS:

Here are a few reminders as you close out the application season:

- If you are applying to colleges that care about **demonstrated interest** (check out this website to remind yourself which ones do: <https://www.collegetransitions.com/dataverse/colleges-that-consider-demonstrated-interest>), make sure that you have shown a healthy amount of interest. Visits and info sessions are key, but you could also reach out to your regional rep and introduce yourself and have an interview! IT IS NOT TOO LATE TO DO THIS!!
- If you have applied Early Decision, please keep working on other applications! If you are not accepted to your ED choice, you really don't want to be scrambling to **write those other supplemental essays** during the winter holiday break. Trust me on this. I find that most students lack motivation to work on college apps once ED decisions are out. Get them done now!
- **Keep working at your classes.** This is not the time to slack off. Most colleges want to see mid-year grades, and many could rescind offers after receiving low final year grades. Some of the UCs may rescind offers if you get lower than a C.
- The first rounds of decisions are starting to come out. Please try to remember that these **college decisions** are more about colleges and their priorities than about you. If you've applied to a balanced list, you should get into at least 60% of the colleges that you applied to. Remember that you want to end up at a college that wants you!
- Think seriously about a **GAP year**. You have one shot at being a college Freshman. Navigating college successfully requires maturity, and a gap year can help you develop that maturity, as well as authenticity (who are you, really?), problem solving, and focus for college. Taking a gap year is a bold and increasingly more common move. Being on the same path / timeline as everyone else really isn't that important!

MESSAGE TO PARENTS WHO ARE LOOKING FOR ASSISTANCE AND RELIEF!

I will be filling comprehensive package slots for sophomores starting in January. With sophomores, I like to focus on their academics (what classes they are taking currently, and which ones they plan on taking junior and senior year) and their activities and summer plans. Planning is crucial; I find that kids and families make decisions early on that can have real and very unintended consequences for college admissions down the road. We'll get going with the full process at the end of the summer before junior year.

Please check out my website for more information: www.mgsed.com/services. I'm more than happy to talk with you about what services I provide. If you know of any families/students who might benefit from my process and approach, please send them my way. My ultimate goal is to reduce the stress on families as they go through the process of finding and applying to colleges that would be a great fit!



PLEASE FORWARD THIS NEWSLETTER TO OTHER FAMILIES WHO WOULD BENEFIT FROM MY APPROACH AND PERSPECTIVE!
(They can subscribe on my website)

FOLLOW ME ON INSTAGRAM @designyourpathtocollege

I help students and their families navigate the college admissions process while decreasing confusion and stress. I empower students to figure out who they are and where they belong, and I provide structure, insight, and enthusiasm as they apply to colleges that are the best fit academically, socially, and financially. Contact me for a 30 minute complimentary session to learn more!



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