

## Stuart Nachbar

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### The College of New Jersey

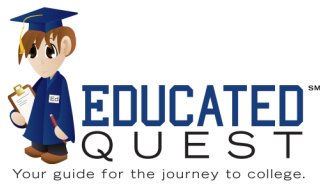
Founded in 1855 as a teacher's college in Trenton, The College of New Jersey (TCNJ) has become the public small school alternative to Rutgers-New Brunswick among New Jersey's best and brightest college-bound students. TCNJ's profile has risen over the past 21 years. Once considered a commuter school, it now houses 94 percent of its freshmen as well as more than 60 percent of all undergraduates on campus. The College ranks high in every college value ranking produced by a major magazine. Most prominently, TCNJ has topped the public colleges in its category (Regional Universities-Masters-Northeast) over those 21 years.

TCNJ could be considered New Jersey's version of The College of William and Mary. TCNJ and William and Mary have undergraduate student bodies of similar size (6,400 vs. 6,100). They graduate about the same percentage of students in business and the sciences, according to *College Results Online*. But TCNJ also grants more than a fifth of its bachelor's degrees in education-related subjects and about five percent of them in health sciences, subjects not offered at William and Mary. TCNJ also grants degrees in engineering, while William and Mary does not. TCNJ has very few graduate programs while William and Mary offers graduate degrees through the doctoral level as well as professional programs in business, education, law and medicine. It is fair to say that TCNJ is more undergraduate focused than William and Mary because it is not reliant on graduate students to teach and does not need to devote as much of its resources to advanced degrees.

Fortunately for New Jersey residents TCNJ is not as national, nor is it as selective as William and Mary. Last year, the College offered admission to about half of its applicants. The middle 50 percent scored between 1180 and 1360 (out of 1600) on the Critical Reading and Math sections of the SAT. The middle 50 percent for those who took the ACT was between 26 and 31. The 75th percentile freshman at TCNJ is similar in terms of numbers to the average incoming freshman at William and Mary.

Students with strong academic records, resident or non resident, should not be discouraged from applying to TCNJ based only on their test schools. Just over half (51 percent) of the class that entered in 2014 scored below 600 on the Critical Reading section of the SAT, though nearly two-thirds scored 600 or higher on the Math section of the test. However, the College will match scores and academic performance against the chosen major when the student is interested in one of the more competitive programs, especially Biology or pre-med. Admission to the 7-Year Medical/Optometry Program, a partnership with Rutgers-New Jersey Medical School, is exceptionally competitive, requiring an interview with a medical school admissions panel as well as acceptance to TCNJ. A 1550 SAT, as a combined score on the Critical Reading and Math sections of the test, is commonplace among those admitted.

TCNJ encourages Early Decision, offering two deadlines, one in November, the other in January. Those who want a seat in the 7-Year Medical/Optometry Program, a must apply by December 1st. Last year TCNJ received deposits from 27 percent of the applicants



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who were offered admission, high for a public college. If TCNJ is the school that you want, and you live in New Jersey, it is best to apply early to get the most consideration. The same is true for students who are interested in the engineering and health science programs as well as art, music and interactive multimedia. TCNJ is test-optional for students who are interested in one of those three creative fields; the College admissions team will consider talent combined with the student's academic record. The nursing and health sciences programs require direct application to the major as well as a strong recommendation to check off a second major when applying.

TCNJ did go to its wait list to admit students for the Class of 2017. According to its 2014-15 Common Data Set, over 1,700 of the nearly 11,000 applicants were offer a place on the wait list. Just over 500 accepted a place on the wait list, with 230 offered admission. One consideration: if they had chosen a major with a high level of competition they had to enter TCNJ with another major.

TCNJ has retained 95 percent of its freshmen classes for each of the past eight years, better than Rutgers-New Brunswick as well as many other public and private schools with more recognizable names. The four-year graduation rate is 73 percent, better than any small or medium-sized (under 10,000 students) public college in the U.S. as well as most larger public universities. Both numbers are very positive indicators of student satisfaction with the education as well as the campus life at TCNJ.

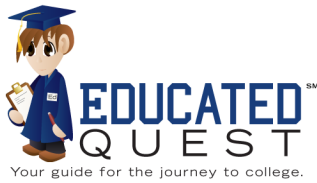
### **Costs**

Among public colleges TCNJ has a very high sticker price for state residents and a very reasonable one for non-residents. New Jersey residents were charged approximately \$15,500, in tuition and fees, the highest of any public institution in the Garden State. Non-resident tuition and fees start at approximately \$27,500. TCNJ charges just over \$12,000 for room and board, about average for any college. TCNJ requests both the FAFSA and the CSS Profile of all families requesting financial aid.

TCNJ offers Out-of-State Merit Scholarships, unusual considering the school is small for a public college; the out-of-state (U.S. states only) population in numbers is small as well. There are also scholarship opportunities for community service, including the Bonnor Scholars, who receive a stipend to develop and lead service projects on the campus or in the surrounding community.

The high sticker price, combined with a low endowment for a school of this size (around \$27 million according to the National Association of College and University Business Officers) means that TCNJ does not meet the full financial need for most of its students. According to the College's 2014-15 Common Data Set, financial aid covered, on average, 42 percent of the need for the freshman class and 46 percent of the entire undergraduate student body.

Students who graduated in 2013 owed, on average, just over \$32,000 about \$8,000 more than Rutgers-New Brunswick graduates did, according to the Project on Student Debt. However, 40 percent of the class graduated with no debt at all, interesting considering that the school offers no athletic scholarships and less than ten percent of the undergraduate student body receive merit-based scholarships. The debt numbers



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combined with the aid numbers indicate that TCNJ attracts a good number of full-pay students who, more likely than not, come from New Jersey.

TCNJ frequently receives “best buy” or “best value” rankings in the media. If one compares TCNJ to private schools, this is understandable. It is quite doubtful that most private colleges, excluding those that can meet a family’s full need, could discount down to TCNJ’s in-state tuition for a New Jersey resident. The College also makes use of New Jersey’s state scholarship program as well as its Economic Opportunity Fund to assist students from economically-disadvantaged backgrounds.

However, a better-endowed private school can make an exceptionally competitive offer to an out-of-state admit who ranks high in TCNJ’s applicant pool. Unless TCNJ’s financial aid or merit aid budget increases, the student body is likely to continue to be dominated by New Jersey residents.

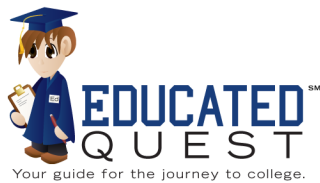
### **Curriculum**

With the exception of engineering students, TCNJ operates like a liberal arts college. All students take a four-course load—engineers take five—and have to fulfill the same distribution requirements, regardless of their major. However, the majority of the students (57 percent) are enrolled in pre-professional programs at the College, according to its 2014-15 Common Data Set. Education students comprise a fifth of the undergraduate students with declared majors followed by Business (16 percent). Psychology and Biological Sciences are the most popular liberal arts majors.

TCNJ hosts approximately half of the students—this year 18 of 40—who are in New Jersey’s 7-year Medical/Optomtry Program. This program includes not only the academic preparation for admission to the medical school as well as special considerations (pursuant to maintaining a 3.5 GPA); it also includes a paid or credit-bearing summer research term between the junior and senior year. All pre-med students, not only the seven-year candidates, receive strong guidance from a Medical Careers Advisory Board.

TCNJ was founded as a teacher’s college. It is fair to say that given the admissions requirements that TCNJ has many students who enter well prepared for the teacher education programs. Education students will have four placements in classrooms during their sophomore and junior years before they do their student teaching during the last semester of their senior year. TCNJ graduates have achieved an outstanding 98 percent pass rate on the PRAXIS teacher exam. The College also offers a unique Bachelors/Master of Arts in Teaching program in Urban Teacher Education to train students to work in city schools at home as well as in other countries. The College also conducts a three-day teacher recruitment fair to help its graduates find positions after graduation.

TCNJ is also one of the smallest public colleges to maintain an internationally-accredited business school as well as an internationally-accredited engineering school. The College also offers a unique major in Management Engineering that combines coursework from the two. Within the business program Finance and Accounting are the most popular majors. Graduates of these majors are recruited by firms such as Deloitte, JP Morgan Chase and Bank of America/Merrill Lynch, among other firms.



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Civil Engineering is the most popular option chosen in engineering. The engineering programs are small, attracting eight percent of the undergraduates who have declared majors. While smaller classes, as well as no graduate engineering degree programs, allow for more personal instruction, there are fewer engineers to be recruited at TCNJ than there would be at schools such as Lehigh, Stevens or Villanova that are not far away, let alone larger engineering programs such as those at Drexel, Delaware, New Jersey Institute of Technology, Penn, Rutgers-New Brunswick or Temple. In addition, while TCNJ has a more personalized program, the programs at smaller schools such as Lafayette or Union are designed to allow students to consider a second major or student abroad while still graduating in four years. The Civil Engineering curriculum at TCNJ, by comparison, mirrors that of a larger school.

Classes in “gatekeeper” introductory courses required for several majors including Biology, Chemistry, Physics and Psychology will have as many as 72 students though upper-level classes will rarely have more than 25; the average is 21. TCNJ reported to *U.S. News* that less than one percent of its classes—only eight—have more than 50 students. By comparison, the College of William and Mary reported that nine percent did. TCNJ is unique among smaller public colleges in that faculty are allowed to take research sabbaticals typical of their peers who work at larger universities. However, these faculty are more likely to engage undergraduates in their research, since the College does not offer many graduate degree programs.

TCNJ students gave their faculty a rating of 3.7 (out of a possible 5.0) on [RateMyProfessors.com](http://RateMyProfessors.com). By comparison students at The College of William and Mary, the most likely public aspirant school, gave their faculty a 3.8. Rutgers-New Brunswick students rated their faculty the same as TCNJ students did, as did students at the University of Delaware. TCNJ is also similar to Villanova University (3.8 rating) in terms of academic options and location.

### Community

TCNJ is located in Ewing, a commuter suburb of New York and Philadelphia that is situated between Princeton, one of the more well-to-do communities in the U.S., and Trenton, one of the most impoverished. There is little for students to do in the area immediately around campus, unless they live in houses nearby. The College, though a partnership with a private developer, constructed Campus Town, a mixed-use project with the college’s fitness center and bookstore, and restaurants on the first floor, student apartments on the upper floors. The bookstore, a Barnes and Noble, opened this semester. Other shops will open later in the school year. The shopping and dining options are open to the community as well as the students.

The College provides a shuttle bus service on Tuesdays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays to downtown Princeton, nearby shopping malls and train service to New York City. The campus is also a 15 minute drive from train service to Philadelphia. Freshmen are not allowed to have cars on campus, except for two-weeks periods. All other resident students may have cars; the parking permit costs \$280. They may also rent cars through a car share program operated on campus by Enterprise Rent-A-Car. Access to a car is more important if you live in the apartments. The larger supermarkets are too far away to



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walk. Local mass transit is more limited than one would find a college town that hosts a larger school.

TCNJ looks older than it really is. The College came to this location in 1935 yet its first building, the Colonial-style Green Hall, looks as if it could have been built about a century before. With a few exceptions, academic buildings as well as some residence halls follow the same colonial design, even though many were not built until after 2000. The campus is attractive; it would more closely resemble more prestigious private colleges—Bucknell is the most similar school visually—with more landscaping and better sidewalks (too many chips and cracks reflecting past construction decisions). Parking is well laid out at the corners and entrance to campus. Students who live on campus can usually park close to where they live.

The campus layout, with a main circular road, is very easy for campus police to patrol. This is one reason that the College has relatively few incidents of crime campus, according to its most recent Clery Report. The exception is liquor law violations; there were more than 290 reported for disciplinary referrals each year from 2012 through 2014. There have also been at least 50 reported arrests for liquor law violations each of these three years. Drug-related disciplinary referrals have trended upward over those three years; there were 115 in 2014. However, arrests are few. There were also eight reported sex offenses over the same three-year period.

As TCNJ's reputation improved among New Jersey students, the College upgraded its academic buildings while also constructing new housing on campus. A redesigned dining hall recently opened. A vastly-renovated Brower Student Center will open in 2017. Recreational facilities are due for upgrade or replacement. The Packer Gym, for example, resembles a public high school gym more than a facility one would find at a selective college. However, the athletic fields are quite modern and well-maintained. TCNJ has been the host site for New Jersey's Special Olympics, the Special Olympics USA Games, and NCAA outdoor sports championships.

About a quarter of TCNJ students are involved in college-recognized Greek organizations (fraternities or sororities), though they have no designated housing on campus. Parties would be in student apartments or off-campus houses, both more crowded than fraternity or sorority houses would be on other campuses. Given the absence of chapter-owned or chapter-managed Greek housing, TCNJ may not be the best school for students who want Greek life, outside of the community service activities, to be a central part of their college experience.

TCNJ has a winning sports program. Varsity teams have won 40 NCAA Division III national championships, the vast majority in women's sports: field hockey, lacrosse and soccer. The field hockey team was national champions in 2014. The College placed in the top 10 in the competition for the Division III Director's Cup from the 1995-96 through 2010-11 academic years, ranking as high as second three times.

### **Comforts**

Virtually all TCNJ freshmen (94 percent) live on campus. TCNJ assigns most of the first-year students to two of the taller, and older, halls on campus: Travers and Wolfe. Honors





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students are assigned to a smaller hall, Norsworthy, sharing the hall with upper-class students. Travers and Wolfe are not fancy though residents have the opportunity to paint murals on their floors. Interestingly, TCNJ invites its graduating seniors to live in these halls one last time during the week before commencement.

Having virtually all of the freshmen in two halls—they are connected by a common first-floor lounge—helps to bond the class. But it also gives them fewer interactions with upper-class students than they might have at other schools. Given the liquor law violations previously discussed, the rules against cars for first-year students and the limited upper-class presence in these halls, the College has to offer good student programming to keep its first-year students engaged. Or it has to expect that these students will want to leave campus when they can. But there are colleges in other communities, including Rutgers-New Brunswick and Montclair State University, that have better access to bus and rail transit than TCNJ.

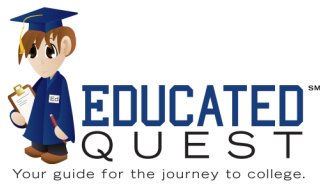
Overall, TCNJ can house more than 60 percent of the student body in a mix of housing options, including dedicated residence halls, apartments, townhouses, even some off-campus houses nearby. The more independent living options are reserved for juniors and seniors. It is also possible for juniors and seniors to rent housing off campus for around \$600 per person per month, including utilities. This is a good option for students who want to take classes during the summer while working nearby or doing research with faculty on campus. However, it might not be the best option for seniors who want to leave the area after they graduate.

Sophomores have a choice between corridor (several rooms sharing common lounges and bathrooms) and suite-style (small number of rooms with a common living area and bathroom) options in six residence halls. TCNJ has a two-year residency requirement; any sophomore who requests housing will have a place to live. Assignments are made by lottery. Students who request to live as a group could be placed in adjacent rooms or a suite depending on their success in the lottery. This works well for students who make friends easily.

### **Connections**

If there is an area where TCNJ really needs to get better, its building an alumni base. The College has been known under its current name for only 20 years; its branding as a “quality liberal arts college” is not much older than that. Of the nearly 28,000 alumni registered in [LinkedIn.com](https://www.linkedin.com), more than 4,000 work in Education. Further the base spreads thin after New York and Philadelphia; more than 21,000 registered alumni work in one of these two metropolitan areas.

TCNJ has several advantages that will enable the school to improve for the benefit of its current students. The clearest are the location and increased pride in the school’s academics. It is very easy to reach the campus off of Interstate 95 to Philadelphia, as well as from the New Jersey Turnpike. Alumni can easily return to visit to network with students and vice versa, coming to campus beyond homecoming events. TCNJ also has a very car-friendly campus for a school of its size.



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However, the average alumni giving rate for the past two years is just below 7 percent, according to the 2016 *U.S. News Best Colleges* guide very low for a school with TCNJ's academic reputation. By comparison, the rate for Rutgers-New Brunswick is slightly better (just under eight percent), and that school has a much larger alumni base. The average alumni giving rate for the College of William and Mary, the closest public college to an aspirant school for TCNJ, is just over 24 percent. The College of William and Mary has a longer history, which means a larger alumni, and it is a more national institution that has drawn about a third of its student body from other states.

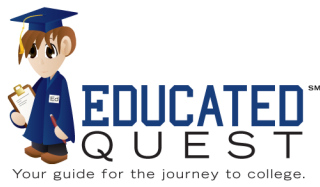
TCNJ's Career Center received an excellent (67 percent) response to its survey of 2014 graduates. The results showed that 96 percent of the graduates in the Class of 2014 who completed the survey had found employment or were enrolled full time in further education. Thirty-one percent reported that their internships had led to a full-time position after graduation. In addition, among the students who had decided to continue their education, the largest group remained at TCNJ. Among the students who were working full time, 82 percent indicated that the education they had received at TCNJ was either "very good" or "excellent" in preparation for their careers. In addition, more than half of the students who reported that they were employed had received at least two job offers.

### Conclusions

TCNJ has succeeded in becoming an attractive alternative to Rutgers main campus for New Jersey resident students who want a small school setting at a public college price. The College's administration upgraded the academic facilities, then the housing to attract these students, who might have otherwise left the Garden State for a private school. It spearheaded the construction of Campus Town as well as a major renovation to the student center to better engage the student body and keep them on campus outside of classes, dining and sleeping. All of this took time, and there is still more work to do.

For the bright New Jersey high school student who wants the academics and smaller campus setting that TCNJ has to offer, the decision to apply Early Decision should be a no-brainer. For those who apply from elsewhere it might be better to consider TCNJ along with private colleges that have more generous financial aid. Regardless of place of residence, the challenge for a first-year student, beyond academics, is to befriend classmates who have cars. Other schools open their gates into larger numbers of student-oriented shopping and dining options, or have better access to mass transit than TCNJ.

The greatest weakness of TCNJ is that it does not have a long history of being TCNJ. TCNJ's reputation as an "academically-oriented school" has been on the rise for more than two decades. The first graduates from those early years are now starting to enter peak earning years. Hopefully their satisfaction will result in more financial resources to help current and future students. But each year the rewards of a TCNJ become greater; the risks for those considering TCNJ versus a school like a William and Mary or an equally notable private school lessen as well. The students who are choosing TCNJ, are buying into a college's most recent past as well as its future.



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**Report Card: The College of New Jersey**

Four-Year/Six-Year Graduation Rates: A

Freshman Retention: A

Costs: B

Comforts: A

Community: B+

Curriculum: A

Connections: B+