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Gettysburg College

There are older American colleges than Gettysburg but few are so entwined with American history. Founded in 1832 as Pennsylvania College, a Lutheran-affiliated institution, Gettysburg is most noted for its ties to former Presidents Abraham Lincoln and Dwight David Eisenhower.

Four months after Confederate soldiers were driven away, alumnus David Wills, class of 1851, prevailed upon President Abraham Lincoln to deliver what later became known as the Gettysburg Address as well as the Emancipation Proclamation. Nearly a century later, former President Dwight Eisenhower retired to Gettysburg and became a Trustee of the College. He wrote his memoirs in what is now Gettysburg's admissions building, aptly named Eisenhower House. Today his granddaughter, Susan, maintains an influential role in the [Eisenhower Institute](#), the College's political think tank based on campus and in Washington DC.

Gettysburg College has approximately 2,400 students and has become one of the more desired liberal arts colleges in the country. Over 80 percent of a freshman class graduates within four years, better than most US colleges and universities. Freshman retention has consistently exceeded 90 percent. Approximately 1 in 7 Gettysburg students is involved with the Sundermen Conservatory, which merged with the College in 2005.

In 2018 there were nearly 6,400 applicants for approximately 750 seats in the freshman class. Forty-five percent were accepted, and the college did not need to go to the wait list. While admissions are test-optional, the middle 50 percent of those who submitted scores scored between 1270 and 1400 on the SAT, and between 26 and 30 on the ACT Composite. Forty percent of the class was admitted through Early Decision. Admissions are "need-blind" for approximately 80 percent of the class, "need-aware" for the rest. The college has advanced its national profile to the point where over 70 percent of the students come from outside Pennsylvania.

Students who consider Gettysburg also look at other liberal arts colleges including Bucknell, Dickinson, Franklin and Marshall and Lafayette in Pennsylvania. They also consider selective liberal arts colleges in other states. Students who are seeking the conservatory experience also consider Lawrence University (WI), Oberlin College (OH), Ithaca College (NY) as well as the Peabody Institute affiliated with Johns Hopkins University. The College is also cross-shopped against mid-sized universities in Washington DC that have strong Political Science and Public Affairs programs: American University, Georgetown University and The George Washington University.

Costs

Gettysburg has a high sticker price of nearly \$70,000 for tuition and fees, room and board. Yet it has been able to meet close (90%) to the full financial need for nearly 90 percent of the student body who had demonstrated need. Merit scholarships were awarded to just over a fifth the freshman class that arrived last year. [The GPA standards to renew these awards are quite reasonable.](#) The largest award, the [Eisenhower](#)



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[Scholarship](#), requires a separate application. The other merit awards do not. [Talent-based awards](#) are also available for students who apply to the Sunderman Conservatory.

Nearly 40 percent of the students who graduated in 2018 had no student loan debt. However, the average indebtedness of 2016 graduates who took out loans was nearly \$32,000, nearly \$5,000 more than a student is allowed to borrow through the Federal Direct Student Loan program.

Curriculum

The Gettysburg curriculum has [general education requirements](#) around four goals: Multiple Inquiries, Integrative Thinking, Effective Communication and Informed Citizenship. All students take a four-course load and may work around these goals to choose multiple majors or minors. The College offers four Bachelor's degree options, depending on the chosen major: Bachelor of Arts (BA), Bachelor of Science (BS), Bachelor of Music and Bachelor of Music Education. Outside of the music programs, some of the majors offer the choice of a BA or a BS.

Taken in total the liberal arts requirements at Gettysburg appear more demanding than at similar schools. However, it is quite possible to use the requirements to earn a degree with a double major or multiple minors if a student plans well. This starts with the careful choice of a First-Year Seminar, since the seminar instructor will be the student's academic advisor until s/he chooses a major. The Seminar is also used as a basis to assign housing to first-year students.

The most popular [majors](#) at Gettysburg include Political Science, History, English, Health Sciences, Psychology, Economics, Environmental Studies, and Biology. The College has a large selection of foreign language options for a small school: ancient Greek, Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Latin, and Spanish and offers the option to learn other languages through study abroad). And, given the community's importance to American history, the College offers a degree in Civil War Studies.

Organization and Management Studies had been a popular major. However, it was replaced by a new co-major in [Business, Organizations and Management](#) starting this fall. Students who opt for this major must also choose a second liberal arts major. Combining the program with Political Science, for example, aids students who are interested in public administration, law and public policy. A combination with Biology helps those who might be interested in health care administration. A [business minor](#) is also available, as in an option in [Mathematical Economics](#), which attracts investment banks and management consulting firms to add Gettysburg to their target schools.

About a third of Gettysburg students concentrate in Mathematics or the sciences. The college offers a BA or BS in [Health Sciences](#). Those who opt for the BS can take more courses in human biology, specifically Anatomy, Epidemiology and Physiology, all highly desired pre-requisites for graduate and professional study, than they are likely to find at other liberal arts colleges. They also have the opportunity to use two computer-based dissection stations. Penn State's main campus, by comparison, has only one. As a result



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of the curriculum and courses, it is easier for a high-achieving student to gain admission into any advanced degree in the health professions.

Gettysburg also supports some of its undergraduate programs through on-campus institutes that engage students in research and other projects. These include, but are not limited to:

The [Center for Public Service](#) has study abroad programs that complement the college's major in Globalization Studies. Students may apply to this major after completing introductory courses in Macroeconomics, International Relations, Cultural Anthropology and Globalization. Students then choose a region of specialization through academic courses as well as language study and study abroad. They may also attend conferences and receive funding for travel, even for passports. Unlike other similar colleges, Gettysburg does not operate a "campus" outside of the United State, preferring to review and vet programs offered by outside providers.

The [Eisenhower Institute](#) offers two undergraduate fellowships. One is organized around a theme, this year's being transportation policy; the other, the Fielding Fellowship is a deep immersion into foreign policy. While the institute's programming and events are focused around politics and public policy, the fellowships are open to any major. Fellows represent the institute at public events, serve as student advisors and attend programming on campus as well as in Washington DC. The Institute invites speakers—elected, appointed, media and academic—of multiple viewpoints to campus. Neither the College nor the Eisenhower Institute are committed to a specific philosophy of governing; the approach is non-partisan and more encouraging of inquiry and self discovery.

The [Garthwait Leadership Center](#) offers a semester-long leadership course, among other programs focused around civil rights as well as the opportunity for students to become mentors to advise student organizations on campus. This Center has grown to the point where over 1,500 students, considerably more than half of the student body, has participated in at least one leadership program on campus.

The college also launched [X-Sig, their Cross-Disciplinary Science Institute](#), with the help of a \$21 million investment from alumni. X-Sig offers a summer research program, interdisciplinary seminars, access to internships and academic year research opportunities and manages a college house around mathematics and the sciences. An [Innovation Lab](#) gives students the opportunity to use computers, 3-D printers, virtual reality and other technology tools to craft and test their ideas. The lab is used not only by science majors, but also by students of art history and history to recreate the past and its artifacts, and by bundling artists. The Lab will be moving into larger quarters.

You are not likely to see large classes at Gettysburg. More than two-thirds of all courses at the College had fewer than 20 students; virtually none had more than 40. Over half of the students will pursue some form of research or creative work with the faculty, outside of a required senior capstone or project.



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Community

Gettysburg's 200-acre campus has been redeveloped and developed since the college's founding. The mix of architecture ranging from Pennsylvania Hall, the original college building erected during the 1830s to the 21st century-designed science center and recreation center could be considered eclectic.

The campus has several landmarks, and that they are easier to find. It is extremely difficult to get lost on the clean, well-manicured campus which can be walked end to end in ten to fifteen minutes. The college has no "fraternity row." Fraternity houses are scattered on campus or across streets from campus buildings. Student parking is near the school's football stadium. Only freshmen are not allowed to have cars.

Between Presidential visits (23 have come to town since Lincoln), an active historic preservation community and Civil War memories, it could be safely argued that Gettysburg is the most famous small town (just over 7,600 residents) in America. However, it is more of a tourist destination than college town. While the Majestic Theatre, owned by the College, shows current movies and there are enough dining options to support a small college student body, the campus is the more important social center.

Gettysburg is a "spirit and sports" school. Eighty percent of the student participated in varsity sports in high school. The College accommodates interests in athletics not only through the varsity sports program, but also a large selection of club sports, including men's and women's rugby, men's hockey and equestrian competition. There is no overlap between club and varsity sports; for example, there is no club lightweight football team. Gettysburg competes in the Centennial Conference in 24 sports (more than most larger schools) along with ten other schools including Bryn Mawr (women's sports), Dickinson, Franklin and Marshall, Haverford, Johns Hopkins, McDaniel, Muhlenberg, Swarthmore, Ursinus and Washington (MD).

"Spirit and sports" also extends to fraternity and sorority life. While the College does not allow students to pledge until their sophomore year, and does not allow members to live in the houses until junior year, Greek social life attracts nearly a third of the student body.

The Pennsylvania Turnpike is within a half-hour of campus on Route 15 and the Maryland border, including the Mason-Dixon Line, the dividing line between North and South during the Civil War, is close by. Baltimore is just over an hour away by car and Washington DC. 90 minutes away. While the College attracts prominent speakers, it is too small to attract noted entertainers who would be attracted to larger performing arts venues in a larger city such as Harrisburg, Baltimore or Washington DC.

Comforts

More than 90 percent of Gettysburg students live on campus (including those who live in the fraternity houses). First-year students live in residence halls on one of two freshman



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quads. All rooms are equipped with a “micro-fridge,” a combination of a compact refrigerator and small microwave oven and are air conditioned. All residence halls are Wi-Fi enabled.

An online housing lottery system, based on class year and grade point average, determines housing options for sophomores, juniors, and seniors. Living options for upper-class students--first-year students live in double rooms or a limited number of triples in traditional corridor-style halls include apartments, suites, singles, and College Houses based around academic or intellectual interests. The college also has an Honors House. The College acquired several motels across Carlisle Avenue, the road leading into downtown Gettysburg, and converted them into student housing. One convenience for students who live in these buildings: off-street parking is close by.

Walk around campus and you will regularly hear Gettysburg students praise the food at “Servo,” the College’s main dining hall. This is one of the few small colleges where you are likely to meet juniors and seniors who have a meal plan. Unlike most small colleges, Gettysburg does not outsource its dining services. The College treats all students to a Thanksgiving dinner at Servo before they go home to spend the holiday with their families and bakes fresh cookies every day. The College does not force first-year students to take the most expensive meal plan, though it offers discounts in Dining Dollars at Ike's, Bullet Hole, the Dive, and the Commons to encourage everyone to purchase one of the four meal plans. The College offers a 7-meal plan to on-campus apartment residents as well as students who choose to live off-campus along with Unlimited, Servo-Plus and 12-meal options.

Connections

Gettysburg’s [Center for Career Engagement](#) offers many programs, including on-campus interviewing, resume and interview reviews and workshops, job shadowing (one day on the job) and networking events expected of a selective liberal arts college. Students who need to work on campus beginning freshman year become acquainted with the Center early; it manages the student employment programs for the College. The Center also programs to help fund commuting budgets (up to \$200) for summer internships, three-day Career Immersion Trips and a Career Clothing Bank to lend students professional attire for interviews.

The Center also selects undergraduate students as Siegfried Fellows. Named for a Gettysburg alumnus, the Siegfried Fellows program involves ten students annually in internships that have actual projects including developing intranets, writing code for computer programs, developing a risk assessment tracker, creating newsletter articles, and preparing client presentations. The Center will also assist students in finding hosts for externships, and in some cases will pay for housing. The College also runs a [Summer Entrepreneurial Fellowship](#) program to help students develop skills to launch their own small businesses.

Gettysburg has one of the oldest college alumni associations in the US with over 25,000 members. The college has produced notable alumni on both sides of the political spectrum including Carol Bellamy, the first Peace Corps volunteer to be named director



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of the organization and former Libertarian presidential candidate and Republican Congressman Ron Paul. The College has also produced a Nobel Laureate, J. Michael Bishop, who won the prize in Medicine for his work in cancer research as well as fashion and style expert, Carson Kressley, host of *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*.

Among the more than 20,000 Gettysburg alumni registered in [LinkedIn.com](https://www.linkedin.com), there are substantial (over 1,000) alumni communities in New York City, Philadelphia, Washington DC, Baltimore and Boston. However, the Midwest and West Coast networks are thin with fewer than 250 based in Los Angeles, Chicago or San Francisco.

Conclusions

Gettysburg is one of the more proactive liberal arts colleges the country when it comes to supporting its students and alumni through their education and life after college. There are more opportunities for experiential learning, study abroad, leadership development research and independent study offered at Gettysburg than a student would ever have time to complete over four years.

But while Gettysburg is a great school for students who want to make connections in the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic states and Washington DC, it will take time for the alumni base to broaden significantly beyond there. While the College has many strengths, this and the costs are its greatest weaknesses.

Report Card: Gettysburg College

- 4 Year/6 Year Graduation Rates: A/A
- Freshman Retention: A
- Costs: B
- Curriculum: A
- Community: B+
- Comforts: A
- Connections: A (Northeast, Mid-Atlantic states and Washington DC)/C (elsewhere)