

COLLEGE BOUND

YOUR APPLICATION MENTORSM

Pennsylvania College Visits

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I spent a week last month touring a variety of colleges in Pennsylvania, starting with Philadelphia schools such as University of Pennsylvania, University of the Arts and Drexel, making my way to Lancaster to see Franklin and Marshall and Dickinson and ending up in Central PA at Susquehanna and Bucknell. Each college represented a different educational experience and I discovered some pleasant surprises along the way. Below is an account of each school.

I wrote the same content on my blog but included pictures too. [College Bound Mentor Blog](#)

University of the Arts

Located in Center City Philadelphia, University of the Arts is a bustling performing and visual arts mecca for students. The visual arts program is highly rated and everywhere on campus you see art being created. From the studio classes where students cluster around a professor or fellow artist to examine each other's work or create their own to a glass blowing center, to an industrial design floor with cutting saws and furniture design. They also have a very competitive musical theater conservatory and drama program. (Only 24 students, 12 male and 12 female, are accepted for each respective program). Their music program is focused on jazz studies and their vocal also has a strong classical component to it. The buildings cover about four city blocks and the main Philadelphia theater lies in the center. The area around the campus is urban and mixed in terms of its safety. This is a great school for a focused artist, who can easily take initiative in a city environment. Students also take advantage of the first Friday of the month to visit art galleries and stock up on "free food".

University of Pennsylvania

Bustling with energy, bands playing, student club tables, and swarms of people aptly describes University of Pennsylvania during my visit. I arrived on admitted students day, so it was no surprise that Penn was charged. The campus itself is beautiful and compact. It is one of the few universities where all of the undergraduate and graduate programs are on the same campus. I wandered through Wharton and I felt like I was on an active trading floor. The building had student groups in every square inch with informal clusters of chairs, conference rooms, computer centers, and classrooms. Students were actively engaged in discussion about how best to present their data and how to develop a cohesive marketing strategy. Students were equally passionate about the humanities and other pre-professional subject. Our information session was moved to a very large, theater-like classroom since it was over-crowded due to spring break. WE were nicely kicked-out early to make room for a positive psychology class that was waiting to take over the classroom. The TA loaded the professor's slides onto the state-of-the-art audio-visual system while the professor brought in Easter candy to pass out to her students to illustrate positive reinforcements. The classroom sat about 300 students, but they all seemed eager to step in. Penn is an enclosed city campus with top programs in every discipline. Students can participate in every activity imaginable and students were passionate about their chosen disciplines. Penn has cleaned up the are directy leading into the campus with a mini-upscale outdoor mall-like feel. However once you go about one mile outside of campus, it is like you are in a different world; the streets are dingier, the lights are not so bright, and you feel outside of the Penn bubble.

Drexel

Students at Drexel are no-nonsense, down-to-earth and thrive in a hands-on learning environment. They come for the coop education and Drexel has been good at providing them work opportunities throughout their tenure. The campus is undergoing a building expansion, but overall it feels like Newark in the shadow of Manhattan. There is a small field that has a very urban feel to it. There is not real central campus feel, but rather a city like feel, however a large percentage of students do live on campus. It is about one mile away from University of Pennsylvania, but worlds away from a cultural standpoint. Drexel does offer some excellent programs such as their business school, nursing, and its core of engineering. They also give generous merit based scholarships.

Franklin and Marshall

Set in the lovely town of Lancaster, Franklin and Marshal is a beautiful, brick campus. Downtown Lancaster is about a 15 minute walk from campus with lots of cute shops, restaurants, galleries, and cafes. The city of Lancaster is more than just Amish country, which provides a plethora of activities for students in terms of internships and the like. The student population is preppy, clean-cut and able to balance academics, extracurricular, and athletic activities. F & M values leadership very highly in its applicant pool as there are numerous opportunities to get involved from House governments, to athletic teams, to the writer's house, to performing arts. Students have the opportunity to participate in numerous and unrelated outside activities and F & M expects its students to take full advantage of this. President Frye came from the University of Pennsylvania and has initiated a number of programs that were successful at Penn, such as the house system and the shared activity housing, such as the Writer's house modeled after the Kelly Writer's House at Penn. Students have the opportunity to meet with writers and also share their own work. There are four houses that freshman live in complete with Faculty member and separate dean. This system gives students the opportunity to lead outside of the classroom. Sports are also very big on campus with 25% of students participating in varsity sports and 75% in club or intramurals. They have a beautiful Olympic size swimming pool and field house.

Admissions takes a wholistic approach to the process, with emphasis on challenge of curriculum and leadership potential. It is SAT optional and students with 100 point lower than the average score of 1350 (M/CR) are recommended not to submit. They do not consider writing in the admissions process, nor do they look at SAT subject tests. Leadership seemed to be the key distinction among students who got in and who did not get in as F & M is a college of doers who thrive in an environment that promotes active balance in one's life. The Greek life represents 26% of the population, more so among men than women, but it does not dominate the social scene.

Dickinson

This 230 plus year old college, located in the small, but quaint town of Carlisle is a lovely, limestone campus with a large green quad and a mix of old and new buildings. The new science center was built with how students learn and how professors teach in mind. There is only one lecture hall in the science center with the rest of the building made up of hands on labs and spaces. This is illustrative of the Dickinson philosophy: everything has an intention and must fit with the overall strategy of the college. The core strengths and values of Dickinson are:

1. **Global Education:** Students should have an interest in how they fit into the world and want to learn and grow in that way. 63% of students study abroad and many of them for a full year.
2. **Environmental Sustainability:** Dickinson has talked the talk and walked the walk on developing ways to sustain the environment for the past 25 years. Their curriculum is inter-disciplinary and hands on from their Gold LEED certified science building to their organic farm, everything has this focus in mind.
3. **Interdisciplinary Research:** All students do a capstone project in their major from curating an art exhibit in the museum, to research to a senior thesis.

The students at Dickinson are mixed, but overall very academic and intellectually curious. They are more down-to-earth than preppy, however there is an intellectual air to them as well. While 25% of students participate in Varsity sports and 85% participate in club sports, it did not seem like a "jock" environment. The field house is somewhat tired, however they do have a fantastic rock wall. The Greek life represents roughly 25% of the population, but it does not dominate the social life. The strongest programs are International Business, Political Science, English, Psychology, International Studies and Art History. While the sciences are strong and growing, only 15 students per year are pre-med. 10% of the students get a law degree after graduation. It is more remote than F & M and is a great school for students who are content with a small thriving town, academic and global pursuits, and a thriving, supportive academic community.

Bucknell

Preppy, work hard-play hard mentality describes the Bucknell student body. We were there on a cold, rainy day, but it did not take away from the beauty of the campus with brick buildings and plenty of green open space. Bucknell has a fairly large Greek system which dominates the social life, but there are also a lot of concerts and events planned by the student body. Sports are big in Bucknell and many students participate. The shoe of choice for girls was "wellies", brightly colored rainboots and boys looked like they stepped out of a J. Crew catalog. Students were homogeneous but seemed happy. The academics are difficult and the selectivity is high.

Susquehanna

Susquehanna is a very pretty campus, all brick and lots of green, set against a farm background. The school is very laid-back as is the student body. The Director of Admissions described it as "One big Happy Family". The student body is fairly homogeneous, but I did see a number of African American students and some other students who seemed artsy. There is a real sense of community service on a local level within the school. The students have gone on a number of hurricane relief rebuilding trips. The mission of the school is to build a global awareness and are requiring some form of experience abroad for all students. They are doing a lot of building on campus and have new dorms and a very nice athletic center and library. The overall environment is quiet, but there are many activities on campus and you are 20 minutes from Lewisburg where Bucknell is located. There is also a graphic art major that is about 5 years old. I went through the art building and I saw a display of digital photos and various art studios.

It is about a 3 hour drive (you just take 80 all the way). It is a rural campus, so students will have to be okay with that. It was a rather rainy day, so there were not too many students out and about, but the students seemed very friendly. I was in the student center and there was a big survey posted in the center on large banners asking about diversity. It was interesting because the questions were about have you ever said something derogatory about somebody different? Have you ever felt like you were different on campus? Have you ever felt discriminated against? Etc. Students put a tally mark up under each category. I wasn't clear if the students filled it out themselves or if it was the result of a survey done somewhere else and just posted.

It also looks like students also go to events at Bucknell (20 minutes away) such as concerts, writer's series, etc. Their creative writing is also very strong.

I am eager to hear about your visits, so if you haven't already let me know how they went. Good luck with the rest of the school year.

Warmly,

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