



25 New Ivies

The nation's elite colleges these days include more than Harvard, Yale and Princeton. Why? It's the tough competition for all the top students. That means a range of schools are getting fresh bragging rights.

August 21, 2006

You could call it a classic case of supply meeting demand. A generation ago, elite schools were a clearly defined group: the eight schools in the Ivy League, along with such academic powerhouses as Stanford, the University of Chicago, MIT and Caltech. Smaller liberal-arts colleges—like Williams, Amherst, Middlebury, Swarthmore and Wesleyan—were the destinations of choice for top students who preferred a more intimate campus. But in the past few decades, the number of college-bound students has skyrocketed, and so has the number of world-class schools. The demand for an excellent education has created an ever-expanding supply of big and small campuses that provide great academics and first-rate faculties.

The bottom line: that one "perfect" school need not break a student's heart. The colleges on the following list—the "New Ivies"—are beneficiaries of the boom in top students. We selected them based on admissions statistics as well as interviews with administrators, faculty, students and alumni. In some cases, admissions directors have also provided examples of "overlap" schools—rivals for applicants to the colleges on our list.

Boston College Chestnut Hill, Mass.

Founded by Jesuits to teach the sons of Irish immigrants, BC today serves 9,000 undergraduates and 4,500 graduate students. About 70 percent of the student body is Roman Catholic. The school's growing popularity among students from around the country has meant a 39 percent increase in applications in five years. "The greatest thing about BC is that you have the opportunity to pursue your individual passion or take electives," says sophomore Carly DeFilippo of Madison, Conn. Students appreciate the strong academics, but also seek out other opportunities. That means wide participation in student government, theater and intramural sports. High-profile alumni include actor Chris O'Donnell and "Saturday Night Live" star Amy Poehler, who were both onstage while at BC. Boston itself is also a major appeal; the campus is about five miles west of downtown.

Bowdoin College Brunswick, Maine

Location's high on the list of reasons students flock to Bowdoin. The star attraction: the Atlantic. The school owns 200 acres of beautiful research property on Orr's Island, off the rocky coast of Maine. In winter, students have plenty of space to ski cross-country. Not surprisingly, Bowdoin draws many mountain climbers, kayakers and hikers. Bowdoin's

students work hard, but the atmosphere is not as intensely competitive as at comparable schools. The most popular major is government and legal studies, followed by economics, English, history, biology, sociology and environmental science. Bowdoin phased out its fraternities a decade ago, and most students now live on campus. Dorms are small—about 30 to 50 students per building—and feel more like apartments. Students praise the food. The school even serves fresh lobster at the first-year banquet. *Overlap schools: Williams, Amherst, Brown, Dartmouth and Middlebury.*

Carnegie Mellon Pittsburgh, Pa.

A major national research university, Carnegie Mellon serves 5,500 undergrads and 3,000 grad students in seven colleges reflecting CMU's academic diversity: Carnegie Institute of Technology (engineering), the College of Fine Arts, the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, the Mellon College of Science, the Tepper School of Business, the School of Computer Science and the Heinz School of Public Policy and Management.

Students have to apply to specific schools. Last year, CMU received a record 18,864 applications and admitted 6,357. The drama program in the College of Fine Arts has the most competitive admissions; engineering is the most popular major overall, but business is catching up. Students laud Pittsburgh. "We have all the amenities of a nice-sized city, but not the hustle and bustle of a city like Chicago or New York," says Mike Hall, associate director of admission. CMU is known for fostering entrepreneurial spirit: staff, faculty, students and alumni have created or spun off more than 170 companies from the university since 1995. That reflects CMU's sterling academics; 15 faculty members and alumni are Nobel laureates. *Overlap schools: Cornell and MIT. Business students sometimes overlap with the University of Pennsylvania, and music students with Juilliard and the Eastman School of Music.*

Claremont Colleges: Harvey Mudd and Pomona Claremont, Calif.

Located 35 miles east of downtown L.A., the five Claremont Colleges (and two grad schools) offer the range of a university with the intimacy of a small college. Harvey Mudd attracts students who might otherwise go to MIT, Caltech or Stanford. Pomona's are likely to apply to schools like Amherst and Williams. With just 700 undergraduates, Harvey Mudd is looking for serious math and science students who have interests outside the classroom. About a third of the class majors in engineering. About two thirds of the classes have fewer than 20 students. The schools stress an honor code; most exams are take-home. The first term is graded high-pass, pass and fail. Students who get several high-pass marks typically get a letter from the dean of students inviting them to find ways to contribute to the campus. "We call this the 'get a life' letter," says Peter Osgood, director of admission.

Pomona traditions abound—like "death by chocolate." During reading period in December, the school gives out thousands of pounds of chocolate and desserts—free. In February, the school celebrates Ski-Beach Day, when students board buses bound for skiing in the morning and swimming at the beach in the afternoon. Each is 45 minutes away.

Colby College Waterville, Maine

Back in 1871, Colby became the first all-male college in New England to admit women. Since then, it's been attracting a diverse group of applicants, including, in the incoming class, from Ethiopia, Zimbabwe and Vietnam. That worldliness goes both ways. Seventy percent of

students study abroad. Though Colby is small, with a freshman class of about 500, it offers 53 majors. The most popular are economics, biology, English and government. The school lures students who love the outdoors, and it boasts strong programs in the environmental sciences and plenty of opportunity to ski, rock-climb and fish. *Overlap schools: Bowdoin, Dartmouth, Middlebury and Bates.*

Colgate University **Hamilton, N.Y.**

Can't decide between a university and a small liberal-arts college? Colgate has both, in an upstate New York setting that includes a lake and a golf course that Golf Digest rated as one of the top five collegiate courses in the United States. Naturally, the school has a Division I golf team. Colgate is "great for athletes, great for serious students and great for people who want to combine both," says Gary Ross, dean of admission. Despite a relatively small freshman class—about 750 students—Colgate offers an array of academic opportunities. The school runs 24 of its own study-abroad programs, with its own faculty; about 66 percent of the students at some point head for places like Australia, Japan, China and South America. Colgate is also the only college in the United States that offers students the chance to study for a semester for credit at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Md. Students, mainly premeds or science majors, can spend fall or spring at the NIH. *Overlap schools: Cornell, Dartmouth, Middlebury and Georgetown.*

Davidson College **Davidson, N.C.**

This private liberal-arts college of 1,600 has benefited from a recent surge in interest. Last year, 3,900 students applied for the class of 2010; only 30 percent were accepted. A decade earlier, admissions officers were sifting through about 2,800 applications. "We look, feel, sound like a New England liberal-arts college—but we're in North Carolina," says Christopher Gruber, dean of admission and financial aid. About a third of students are from the Southeast. The most popular majors are biology, economics, English, history and political science. Students can also concentrate in a particular area within a major—for example, biology with a concentration in medical humanities. *Overlap schools: University of North Carolina, Duke, University of Virginia, Georgetown, Vanderbilt, Rice, Boston College, Pomona, Stanford and the Ivies.*

Emory University **Atlanta, Ga.**

In 2005, applications to Emory climbed 18.5 percent from the previous year and came from all 50 states, proving that the school had surpassed its reputation as only an excellent regional school. Students often cite Emory's Atlanta location, which makes it easy to get internships and jobs, as well as to cross-register with the other colleges in the area. But as a major university, Emory has plenty to keep students busy on their own campus. Some students start at Oxford College, Emory's smaller two-year division, and then continue on to "big Emory" for their junior and senior years. Oxford has just 650 students and its own faculty. *Overlap schools: Duke, Washington University in St. Louis, University of Pennsylvania, Georgetown, University of Georgia, University of Virginia and University of North Carolina.*

Kenyon College **Gambier, Ohio**

Kenyon "has shifted from a backup school to a first choice," says Jennifer Delahunty Britz, dean of admission and financial aid. "We tend to get very intellectually diverse kids—students

who want to major in biology and English." Although the school is intellectually rigorous, students say its atmosphere encourages collaboration rather than competitiveness. The student-faculty ratio is just 9 to 1, and the average class has only 14 students. Many faculty live within a bike ride of campus, which further encourages a sense of community. Kenyon is often called a writer's college, and graduates include "Seabiscuit" author Laura Hillenbrand and E. L. Doctorow. Students can stay fit in a \$70 million athletic center that opened in January.

Macalester College **St. Paul, Minn.**

Macalester students are passionate about academics, politics and extracurriculars, says Lorne Robinson, dean of admissions and financial aid. Being in St. Paul helps. Most small liberal-arts colleges tend to be in rural areas or small towns. Macalester's 1,840 students—all undergraduates—come from 80 countries and all 50 states. Despite its size, Macalester's catalog lists 750 courses. The most popular majors: political science, economics and biology.

University of Michigan **Ann Arbor, Mich.**

Senior Nicole Stallings, president of the Student Assembly, chose the school because "I felt like no matter what I decided, there would be a good program." That range of excellence is a huge attraction of this world-class research university. From engineering to the humanities to medicine, Michigan is at the top of just about every list of academic leaders. Many out-of-state students come for the competitive honors program in the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts (LSA), which usually includes 1,700 to 1,800 students a year—or 10 to 11 percent of LSA undergrads. Honors students get smaller class sizes and can choose to live in a dedicated area of campus. That makes it a small grouping within the larger university, which serves 25,500 undergrads and 14,500 grad students. *Overlap schools: New York University, University of Pennsylvania and Northwestern.*

New York University **New York, N.Y.**

NYU is not for the timid. In the heart of Greenwich Village, there is no traditional campus. The urban experience is apparently appealing: this past season, there were a record 34,944 applications. The previous record? The year before. They're attracted by strong programs in NYU's eight colleges.

Arts and Sciences is the largest (the most popular majors are politics, journalism and English). The Tisch School of Performing Arts, with about 700 freshmen, is one of the hottest arts schools in the country. Although living in Manhattan is obviously key, NYU also promotes study abroad. Two years ago the school opened a site in Ghana; the newest addition is Shanghai. NYU is setting up broad curriculum programs at each of its sites so that students from all majors can participate. And back in the big city, there's no chance to get bored: NYU offers more than 2,500 courses and 25 different majors.

University of North Carolina **Chapel Hill, N.C.**

If a moviemaker needs an idyllic setting for a film about college life, Chapel Hill might be just the place. Elegant buildings, many in Greek Revival style, dot the lush campus filled with dogwoods and azaleas. For a prestigious public university, the atmosphere is relaxed, many students say. "It's a combination of absolutely first-rate academics and a wonderful sort of

collaborative, low-key culture," says Stephen Farmer, director of undergraduate admissions. Junior Heath Nettles, an education major, grew up aiming for UNC, his father's alma mater. "I sometimes tell people I had blue blood," he says, referring to the school colors. When he hears the James Taylor song "Carolina on My Mind," he says, "my heart skips a beat." The 3,838 incoming freshmen (out of 19,688 applicants) can expect to have a similar reaction. Most popular majors: business, English, psychology, biology and history.

University of Notre Dame South Bend, Ind.

It can't be the weather. "This is not God's paradise," says Dan Saracino, assistant provost for enrollment, of Notre Dame's northern Indiana location, where the temperature can sink well below freezing in winter. So why do so many alumni and students love the place? Many cite the unique spirit of this Catholic university. More than half of entering freshmen say Notre Dame is their first choice—an unusually large number. "When we survey students and ask the three things they think about when they think of Notre Dame, they'll say tradition, faith and academics," Saracino says. And, of course, football: the legendary Fighting Irish.

Notre Dame students are not slackers; 95 percent graduate in four years. (Only Harvard and Princeton have equivalent records.) Appropriately for a religious school, more than 80 percent of students are involved in community service—and more than half study abroad. Each year more than 10 percent of graduates go into community-service positions, such as the Peace Corps or AmeriCorps. Although 83 percent of the students are Catholic, religion doesn't play a role in the admissions process, says Saracino.

Olin College of Engineering Needham, Mass.

Over the past 60 years, the Olin Foundation has built 76 buildings on 68 campuses around the country. In a final testimonial to founder Franklin W. Olin (an engineer and entrepreneur), the foundation decided to build a college of engineering. The foundation endowment, about \$450 million, was transferred to Olin, which enrolled its first class in 2001. The school has an independent spirit that's reflected in the admissions process. Faculty and staff evaluate applicants and make recommendations to the admissions committee, which then invites about 180 of them to campus for a two-day evaluation.

Admission to Olin, which doesn't charge tuition, is highly selective; the school lands students who might otherwise pick MIT or Caltech. With just 300 undergrads, Olin "feels like your second family," says senior Adam Joe College, of Clearwater, Fla. An electrical- and computer-engineering major, he wants to get a master's in technology entrepreneurship and start his own business—a goal of many Olin students.

Reed College Portland, Ore.

Who is the ideal Reed student? "Reed is for independent-minded, intellectually passionate students, people who care about ideas, people who challenge conventions," says Paul Marthers, dean of admission. Reed ranks in the top three of U.S. schools for the percentage of graduates who earn Ph.D.s, and it has produced 31 Rhodes scholars. The required curriculum includes a Great Books core: Virgil, Homer, Aristotle, Plato, selections of the New Testament and Greek and Roman plays. About a third of students major in science and math, a third in social sciences and a third in arts and humanities. Students must produce a thesis, which is then bound and put in Reed's library.

Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute

Troy, N.Y.

Applications to RPI were up 23 percent in 2005—a reflection of the school's reputation as an educator of scientists and engineers. The class of 2010 is 29 percent female. Students like the school's state-of-the-art facilities, including the Center for Biotechnology and Interdisciplinary Studies. RPI also operates a co-op program that lets students work at companies like IBM. Hockey is big on campus; RPI has a Division I team that's won two national championships. Skiing is also popular; the campus is just 45 minutes from the Adirondacks and the Catskills.

Rice University

Houston, Texas

Although Rice is located just three miles from downtown Houston, the 300-acre campus is pastoral. The private university's nine residential colleges were inspired by Oxford and give students an opportunity to belong to a more intimate group. Each college has a "faculty master" selected by students, other masters and the president. The emphasis on student-faculty interaction is echoed in the classroom, where the median class size is 15. Many students like the fact that Rice has Division I sports, including a top baseball team. About 40 percent of students double-major, often pairing economics with engineering or political science. *Overlap schools: Stanford, Harvard, MIT and Duke.*

University of Rochester

Rochester, N.Y.

Over the past decade, this small, private university has dramatically changed its curriculum. "We threw out general education," says Jonathan Burdick, dean of admissions. Students now pick all their courses. As a research institution, Rochester is particularly strong in science and engineering, but liberal arts are also popular, along with music and nursing. About 70 percent of humanities students study overseas, and about 80 percent go to grad school. Most students live on campus, which is some distance from downtown Rochester. *Overlap schools: Cornell, Brown, Tufts, NYU and Northwestern.*

Skidmore College

Saratoga Springs, N.Y.

Consider the location: a picturesque small city (with good restaurants) that's three hours from New York, Boston and Montreal. That's great for students who don't want to study in an urban area, yet want access to big cities. Skidmore offers a broad curriculum, with traditional majors in the liberal arts and sciences, but also in subjects like management and business. The college is strong as well in individual and performing arts. Saratoga Springs has the oldest Thoroughbred racetrack in the United States. It's the permanent summer home of the New York City Ballet and the Philadelphia Orchestra. The school runs its own programs in London, Spain, Paris, India and Beijing, and is affiliated with many other overseas programs. *Overlap schools: Vassar, Connecticut College, Wesleyan and NYU.*

Tufts University

Medford, Mass.

Applications to this medium-size university in a Boston suburb have increased 80 percent in the last decade. Lee Coffin, director of undergraduate admissions, says the school's mission is why. "We're using the intellect to make a difference in the world," he says. "Look at the liberal arts. Look at the engineering fields. How do you take these disciplines and interpret them broadly?" Students are expected to take what they learn and find real-world applications. That would mean, say, that a civil-engineering major would volunteer to help rebuild New Orleans.

It's not surprising that international relations is the school's most popular major, followed by economics, political science, psychology and child development. More than 40 percent of students study abroad. Tufts stresses foreign languages, with full majors in Latin, Chinese, Japanese and Russian. *Overlap schools: Brown, University of Pennsylvania, Georgetown and Cornell.*

University of California, Los Angeles **Los Angeles, Calif.**

UCLA this past year received a record 47,307 applications; 12,221 got in. Location, moderate cost for California residents and lots of course choices are big selling points, says Vu Tran, director of undergraduate admissions. The College of Letters and Sciences represents about 80 percent of undergrad programs, with the rest in the schools of engineering and applied science, arts and architecture, and theater, film and TV. The most popular major is biology or biology-related majors like biochemistry, followed by psychology and political science. Because UCLA is a public university, most students are from California, but 10 percent of this fall's freshmen are from out of state and 3 percent are from abroad. Major building projects include theaters, studios, the California Nanosystems Institute and enough dorm space so that students can live on campus all four years.

Vanderbilt University **Nashville, Tenn.**

Founded in 1873 by Cornelius Vanderbilt, the university appeals to students who want an urban school with a small-town feel. The campus is so full of shrub and tree varieties—300 in all—that it was designated a national arboretum in 1988. Vanderbilt requires all undergrads to live on campus—unusual for a city school but also "critical" to creating a cohesive student community, says John Gaines, the associate dean of undergraduate admissions. About two thirds of students study liberal arts. The rest are in the schools of engineering, education and music. The most popular major is human and organizational development, followed by economics. *Overlap school: Duke.*

University of Virginia **Charlottesville, Va.**

Developing leadership is a guiding principle at Virginia's flagship public university, says John Blackburn, dean of admission. "What students tell us they like about UVA is the quality of life, the student experience of basically running this place." UVA boasts more than 500 student organizations, including a Quaker worship group and the Queer Student Union. At most schools, the dean of students passes out the money to run such organizations. At UVA, says Blackburn, the elected student council (with no faculty adviser) decides who gets what. UVA also has the highest African-American graduation rate for a public university: 87 percent. African-Americans make up 9.4 percent of the student population; Asian-Americans constitute an additional 11 percent, and Latino students make up 4.5 percent. The most popular majors are politics, English and biology. A significant number of UVA grads join groups like the Peace Corps or Teach for America—a testament to the school's emphasis on community service. Most fun tradition: students streaking The Lawn (designed by founder Thomas Jefferson) at night. *Overlap schools: Duke, William & Mary, University of North Carolina, Georgetown and Princeton.*

Washington University in St. Louis **St. Louis, Mo.**

Not so long ago, Washington University was a highly regarded regional institution whose

reputation didn't extend much beyond its Midwestern roots. But these days Wash U is luring top students away from the Ivy League and other leading schools. Wash U now admits only about one out of five from an increasing pool of applicants. Admissions director Nanette Tarbouni says the school's draw is "a strong academic environment, and our campus is a warm, friendly and welcoming kind of place." Founded in 1854, the university offers 90 undergraduate programs in five schools. Students apply to one school, but can transfer if their interests change. The most popular majors are liberal arts, psychology, biology, languages, engineering and architecture. Many students also choose double majors or minors, even picking them from different schools—say, history and architecture. *Overlap schools: Stanford, Duke, Harvard, Northwestern and University of Pennsylvania.*