

**25 Hottest Universities**

College Guide: It's that time of year again, when high-school seniors and their parents gear up for the admissions game. In excerpts from our annual newsstand issue, here's what you need to know about the newest trends.

By Jay Mathews

**Newsweek**

Aug. 20-27, 2007 issue - Like shoes, cars, Web sites and stars tracked by paparazzi, good colleges go in and out of fashion. Whether they're mentioned more often, or less often, in any given year has little to do with their inherent qualities. A big state university with a powerhouse engineering department or a tiny private college with an English department known for its poets will retain those assets a long time, even if they're not always part of the buzz at education conferences. Ethereal as this rise and fall of interest may be, it has benefits. As fashions change, one feature that was just a bullet point in a good school's brochure becomes a top attraction: the coming of a presidential election will help spotlight one college's emphasis on political science. Growing dissatisfaction with standardized tests can awaken interest in a school that long ago decided not to require the SAT or the ACT. Our new list of the nation's hottest colleges should be seen in this light as subjective and temporary—but in a good way.

Subjective also means this isn't an official ranking. You may have heard this past spring that an organization of liberal-arts colleges called the Annapolis Group issued a statement saying some member schools would stop participating in the part of the U.S. News & World Report's annual survey in which college administrators assess peer schools using a numerical system. The move was a reaction to a longstanding controversy about the usefulness of numerical listings that order institutions by how they fare on a range of statistical measures. Critics say these measures don't give a full picture of a school. Instead of a numerical ranking, our list is a quick but colorful snapshot of today's most interesting schools. We've talked to a range of experts—admissions officials, educational consultants, students, parents, and

college and university leaders—in making our selections. We've been particularly influenced by the views of high-school counselors, the people most in tune with what matters to the latest wave of college applicants.

Some of these schools are large. Some are tiny. Some charge more than \$40,000 a year and some only a tenth that amount. Some are celebrated, but one was completely unknown to us and several experts we consulted until a well-traveled counselor pointed it out. All the schools have strong programs that can change young lives for the better. Being hot for the moment is as good an excuse as any for applicants to see if one of them might be just right for them.

### **Hottest Ivy**

Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y.

Unlike the other Ivies, Cornell is a land-grant college emphasizing problem solving as well as scholarly debate. The university boasts a world-class engineering college and top-flight liberal arts, science and fine arts. The hotel school is considered the world's best. Cornellians, proud of the variety on campus, point to the president, David Skorton, a cardiologist, jazz musician and computer scientist who is the first in his family to have a college education.

### **Hottest for Sports Fans**

University of Florida, Gainesville, Fla.

Winning the national football championship, as well as two consecutive basketball titles, is clearly a draw. Applications to Gatorland are up 15 percent in the last two years, nearly twice the national average. But high-school counselors are discovering it has more to offer its 35,000 undergraduates than just a great excuse to hit the sports bars. The university attracts more students from the International Baccalaureate

program—the most challenging courses in American high schools—than any other college. The average Gator freshman had a 3.99 GPA in high school. Freshman Robin Prywes, a Maryland resident, says the only thing those sports championships taught her was that Florida had great school spirit. She says she liked the school's "academic reputation, student involvement, great weather and friendly atmosphere." But her mother says it was mostly the weather.

### **Hottest Men's College**

Morehouse College, Atlanta, Ga.

Morehouse has long been known as an educator of black leaders like Martin Luther King Jr., Samuel L. Jackson and Spike Lee. But it may be equally important as an exemplar of single-sex education. With 3,000 students, it is the nation's largest private men's liberal-arts college. Recent grad Marcus Edwards calls the school "the No. 1 institution for black men." Goldman Sachs has just donated \$2 million to endow a new leadership professor, and the Ray Charles Performing Arts Center is now going up.

### **Hottest for No SAT or ACT Needed**

Bates College, Lewiston, Maine

Many colleges are SAT- or ACT-optional only for students with very good grades. But at Bates, applicants never have to submit their test scores, and half do not. The liberal-arts school, with about 1,700 students in central Maine, gets high marks on various college rankings. Students like Alex Chou, valedictorian at his Old Orchard Beach, Maine, high school, love the no-test-score option. "My high school did not prepare us for the SATs," he says. When Chou applied, he thought his 1220 score would hurt him, so he didn't submit it. He got in, and graduated this spring *summa cum laude*. Once at Bates, students say they like that professors are hired particularly for their teaching ability, the relaxed social atmosphere free of fraternities and

sororities, and the international atmosphere—70 percent of students study abroad.

### **Hottest for Science and Engineering**

California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, Calif.

Caltech students think of themselves as geeks with power tools. On a beach weekend they may get sand kicked in their faces, but their assailant will soon find his car disassembled and reassembled on top of a lifeguard station, with the engine still running. There are only 900 undergraduates, and admission is very competitive: 17 percent get in. The lucky ones go on to reap the wealth and fame that come to them in an era in which so many of our troubles—global warming, rush-hour traffic, male-pattern baldness—are thought to be solvable if we just give scientists enough money. Even female Teachers say they have fun once they get used to attending one of the last colleges in America where women are still a distinct minority (30 percent). All students look forward to Ditch Day, when automobiles are sometimes found reassembled in side dorm rooms—with the engines still running.

### **Hottest Liberal-Arts School You Never Heard Of**

Centenary College of Louisiana, Shreveport, La.

When Wendy Andreen, counselor at Memorial Senior High in Houston, visited Centenary, she discovered it had just 1,000 students—half the size of her school. She thought it was too small and too unknown, but then changed her mind. It's "a secret treasure packed with degree options, is five minutes away from a thriving downtown on the riverfront and is sitting on one of Hollywood's latest discoveries for movie locations," she says. It's also a Division I school, the smallest in the country. Centenary is a rare combination of academic innovation, with students creating their own majors, and big-time sports (except football). The college also has a solid reputation in various professions, from performing arts to geology.

### **Hottest for Rejecting You**

Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

This was a close one. Harvard rejected 91.03 percent of its applicants to the class of 2011. It seemed likely, once again, to win the trophy for Stingiest Admissions. But wait: Columbia College, part of Columbia University, rejected 91.05 of applicants. Its student newspaper declared it the winner. Some Columbia freshmen, however, attend the School of Engineering and Applied Science or the School of General Studies, which means that only 89.6 percent of applicants felt the pain. Not that any of the people who send out all those thin envelopes are happy about it. The *über*-selective Ivies know their admission process is a dreary march toward disappointment. The Harvard admissions office, the prime offender, particularly feels the strain. Its top officials recently coauthored an essay in *The Harvard Crimson*, saying they hoped the elimination of Early Decision (along with Princeton's and the University of Virginia's) will give students more time to consider where to apply. That may reduce autumn-application pressure, but nine out of 10 of those candidates will still likely be getting bad news.

### **Hottest for Election Year**

Claremont McKenna College, Claremont, Calif.

Two of every five CMC students major in government/international relations. Most of the rest are also talking politics, the campus obsession. Few selective colleges in America have such ideologically balanced faculties and student bodies. Speakers like Bill Clinton and Justice Antonin Scalia dropped by last spring, and neither was tarred and feathered. CMC, one of the five Claremont Colleges, is vibrating with anticipation of the 2008 presidential race. Andrew Lee, a recent graduate and political junkie who created the Fantasy Congress Web site, says that on long campus weekends he and his friends would skip the beach and drive to a state with a hot election and knock on doors for their favorites.

### **Hottest on The Rebound**

Tulane University, New Orleans, La.

Hurricane Katrina was a blow, forcing the students to abandon the campus just as school was starting in 2005. But the university's long reputation as an attractive option for ambitious high schoolers brought a rush of young talent back to the campus in numbers that surprised even Tulane's administrators. With nearly 1,400 students, the class of 2011 is 56 percent larger than the previous year's, a level the university thought would take three years to achieve.

### **Hottest for Free Tuition**

Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, New York, N.Y.

This collection of 1,000 undergrads in the East Village of Manhattan is one of the oddest, and most selective, colleges in the country. Tuition is free, even for millionaires' kids, but the Cooper Union mantra is they all pay for it in sweat and blood because of demanding courses and tough grading. There are just three majors—architecture, art and engineering. That produces an unusual mix of computer engineers and introspective painters. The big excitement on campus, particularly for the architecture majors, is the new nine-story academic building, the city's first green college laboratory building with a cogeneration plant, radiant ceiling heating and cooling panels, and photovoltaic panels.

### **Hottest Mega-University**

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

Coming from a small Roman Catholic high school, Joe Iniguez found the 37,000-student UCLA campus was just what he wanted. "I wanted to experience something bigger," he says. Some students, of course, find the university daunting, but the opportunities are so vast and the undergrads so

smart (the freshman class had an average GPA of 4.3) that most find their niche. With degrees in 120 majors, hundreds of undergrads do publishable research with senior faculty.

### **Hottest Catholic School**

Fordham University, New York, N.Y.

Amanda Fiscina was one of only 300 national semifinalists in the Intel Science Talent Search. That virtually wrote her ticket to an Ivy League school. So why did she pick Fordham? Although she's Roman Catholic, Fiscina had gone to public schools on Long Island, and wasn't thinking about a Catholic college until she attended a Fordham information session. She was impressed not just by the academics, but the school's commitment "to prepare us as people with strong morals, values and ethical behavioral standards." With 7,700 undergrads, Fordham has mostly small classes, never more than 25 students in Fiscina's first year.

### **Hottest Big-City School**

Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.

Washington's place in American history and culture keeps the annual flow of applications to Georgetown to more than 16,000, with only 20 percent accepted. Coming from Rhode Island, recent graduate Alana Chloe Esposito says she was thrilled with "internship opportunities, a fun off-campus social life" and being close to the nation's leaders. Classmate Jessica Kuntz says, "JT III didn't hurt," meaning she was drawn to the Hoya basketball team led by John Thompson III, son of Georgetown national-champion coach John Thompson Jr. With 6,300 undergrads, Georgetown is a leader in international studies. Enhancing that reputation: a new campus in Qatar and former secretary of State Madeleine Albright on the faculty.

### **Hottest for Pre-Meds**

Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Md.

The school's world-class labs and computer facilities have long been a draw, particularly for students studying anatomy and physiology. But Denver-based educational consultant Steven Antonoff sees it as more than that. "Social life has picked up in recent years," he says, "and there are wonderful humanities, music and public-policy/international studies." Bill Conley, dean of enrollment and academic services, says that increasing appreciation of the school's other academic strengths and its lovely campus in the middle of Baltimore have caused a 66 percent jump in Regular Decision applications and a 94 percent increase in Early Decision applications since 2002.

### **Hottest in the War on Terror**

New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology, Socorro, N.M.

New Mexico Tech, in a friendly desert town an hour south of Albuquerque, has reduced admissions red tape while quietly building, with a flood of federal dollars, one of the prime research centers for fighting the War on Terror. It is in some ways the Los Alamos of a new age, this time focusing on searching suitcases and disabling roadside explosives rather than building the A-bomb. The school boasts a stylish collection of historic buildings with red tile roofs and a lush 18-hole golf course.

### **Hottest Small State School**

State University of New York at New Paltz, New Paltz, N.Y.

Alicia Mejias chose SUNY New Paltz because it was just 90 minutes from her family in Brooklyn, didn't cost too much and had a step team. Her only concern was she'd be one of the few Hispanics on the rural campus of 6,400 undergrads. That worry was allayed by a rush of festivities that included Jam Asia, Carribash and Latino Week. "Since I was the first in my family to attend college," she says, "I didn't know what to expect." She concluded New Paltz was a place "where anyone should be able to grow." More first-generation

college students are enrolling. The school recently opened a 57,000-square-foot Athletic and Wellness Center with an indoor track.

### **Hottest for Liberal Arts**

Princeton University, Princeton, N.J.

Max Staller chose Princeton in 2004 because it met both his professional and his artistic needs. He wanted a career in scientific research, and the biology courses were perfect. But he's also pursued his interest in the arts by picking minors in theater and dance. Many of his classmates have, like him, both careerist and intellectual leanings. Junior Sarah Dajani loves it that "lampposts overflow with fliers advertising the next lecture by a Nobel laureate or performance by the French theater troupe." The emphasis lately is to make sure such opportunities are not confined to rich students who can afford them. The university has recently become one of very few to offer grants, not loans, to those who qualify for financial aid, with 54 percent of the incoming freshman class receiving on average \$31,000 in grants apiece.

### **Hottest for First-Generation Students**

Queens College (City University of New York), Queens, N.Y.

Although its families are becoming more affluent, Queens College remains a likely choice for students whose parents never went to college (38 percent of the student body). Its most celebrated recent fictional graduate is Ugly Betty—Betty Suarez—the working-class character played by America Ferrera on the ABC comedy. The school's biggest claim to fame is the several generations of lawyers, doctors and other professionals who could not afford the Ivies and say Queens changed their lives. It's still a bargain with tuition of \$4,000. It looks nothing like the big city campuses of Manhattan. It has 77 acres of rolling lawns and a tree-lined Quad.

### **Hottest for Loving the Great Outdoors**

St. Mary's College of Maryland, St. Mary's, Md.

This state school on the southern shores of Maryland has all the advantages of a small liberal-arts college without budget-breaking tuition. The academically rigorous school also has deep ties to nature. St. Mary's 1,900 undergrads take advantage of being on the St. Mary's River. "From sailing, swimming, fishing, beach bonfires, kayaking and crabbing to polar-bear swims, windsurfing, using a seine net for a bio class or just playing with the bioluminescent algae, the river is the single greatest stress reliever on campus," says junior Shane Hall. The sailing team won two national championships this year, and the May Day festivities were as raucous as usual. "Who wouldn't want to strip naked, paint themselves in psychedelic designs and colors, and bike through a crowd of several hundred people at high noon?" asks Hall.

### **Hottest Women's College**

Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

With 2,800 students, Smith is the nation's largest women's college, and the first to start an engineering program. It is part of the Five Colleges consortium with nearby Mount Holyoke, Amherst, Hampshire and UMass Amherst. The facilities, particularly the cottage-style houses where students live in groups of 13 to 80, are so attractive that visitors originally preferring a coed college often change their minds. "Smith kind of won me over," says Katie Green, who thought she would go to a school with men. "When else in your life can you get the experience of being surrounded by smart, motivated young women who really care about what they're doing?"

### **Hottest Music School**

Eastman School of Music, Rochester, N.Y.

Eastman is heaven for instrumentalists, but students also get to study at the University of Rochester, of which it is a part. It's perfect for aspiring musicians who don't want to sacrifice academics. That's why bassist Erin

McPeck of Aurora, Colo., chose Eastman; she's now planning a scholarly career in music research while working as a physics teaching intern at Rochester and participating in Eastman's Institute for Music Leadership. Applications were up 10 percent this year, more than the national average.

### **Hottest for Saving America's Schools**

University of Texas-Austin, Austin, Texas

Texas's flagship state university is rising to new prominence in education reform. UT-Austin researchers like economist Chrys Dougherty have done landmark work on the effects of Advanced Placement high-school courses on college success. UT mathematician Uri Treisman has led the way in raising the level of instruction for minority children. A rapidly expanding program called UTeach recruits science and math majors into teaching with classroom experience as early as freshman year. "The kind of mentoring I received from master teachers was really important," says Katie Weber, a 2004 UTeach alum who teaches seventh-grade science. The Teach for America program on campus is soaring, with the number of new graduates heading for inner-city and rural classroom assignments increasing from 24 to 62 in just a year.

### **Hottest Big State School**

University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, Wis.

Growing up in Wisconsin, Laura Sullivan was raised on Badger mania. But she was initially afraid that she would get lost in Madison amid 41,000 students, 140 undergraduate majors and nearly 700 student organizations. So when her high-school German class visited, Sullivan says she was shocked to find that she immediately felt at home. The tree-filled campus of nearly 1,000 acres looked to her exactly like a college should. It occurred to her that its enormity actually meant "endless opportunities," she says. It is the old traditions graduates remember most, including Picnic Point, declared by one newspaper to be "the kissing-est spot in North America."

### **Hottest for International Studies**

University of Richmond, Richmond, VA.

Seventy percent of the class of 2007 studied abroad, attending universities in Oxford, Edinburgh, Prague, Milan, Buenos Aires, Hong Kong, Bangkok and other cosmopolitan spots. The 3,000-student university has exchange agreements with more than 50 schools around the world and ensures that time spent abroad costs no more than time on campus. The faculty is strong in many areas, particularly business, science and leadership studies, but all students are urged to see the world.

### **Hottest for Business**

Babson College, Babson Park, Mass.

Just as violinists know why they're at Juilliard, and physicists at Caltech, the 1,700 students attending Babson understand what made them choose this small campus. They are entrepreneurs, and no school does a better job than Babson in teaching how to start businesses. Jason Reuben grew up in Los Angeles and by fourth grade was selling ketchup packets at his elementary school's Friday barbecues. He started a Web design firm in high school. He knew Babson was for him when, during a campus visit, he saw all the people in one lecture hall pull out their laptops to look up business data.

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