

Should You Attend a Women's College?

What do Nancy Pelosi, Madeleine Albright, and Hillary Clinton all have in common? Apart from being powerful female leaders in their fields, they all also attended women's colleges. We at CollegeVine often hear from young women who are interested in doing the same. Many want to know more about the advantages of attending a women's college. Some want to know what the primary disadvantages are, too.

There are many different factors to consider when choosing a college, and women's colleges can be a great fit for some applicants. In this post, we'll discuss some of the pros and cons of attending a women's college, so that you can decide if a women's college is right for you.

How Common Are Women's Colleges?

While there used to be more than 230 women's colleges in the United States, this number has dwindled as female students were welcomed into schools that used to be for males only. Now, fewer than 40 women's colleges remain.

Though they now account for only a small percentage of colleges nationwide, some women's colleges account for top spots in the national college rankings. In fact, the top-ranked women's college, [Wellesley](#), ties for third place on this year's [US News and World Reports ranking of National Liberal Arts Colleges](#). [Smith](#) is not far behind at number 11, and [Barnard](#) rounds out the top 25.

Many women's only colleges foster partnerships with nearby coeducational schools, thereby allowing students to cross register for classes as they wish, taking both women's only classes at their home institution and enrolling in coeducational classes at partner schools. Barnard partners with Ivy League Columbia, just across the street in New York City. Across the country on the west coast, [Scripps College](#) is part of the Claremont Consortium, allowing students to register for classes at number five ranked Pomona College, among others.

While women's colleges aren't as prevalent as they used to be, they are still a great option for many young women. Women's colleges are among some of the top-ranked colleges in the country, and many offer a competitive academic program alongside topnotch student resources.

What Are the Pros of Attending a Women's College?

Women's colleges offer a unique learning environment. Taking classes with other females can foster confidence and community. At a women's college, students can be certain that they are supported in every field of study, even those typically dominated by males. Students often report a high degree of classroom participation and a supportive network of peers.

According to [a survey conducted by the NSSE \(the National Survey of Student Engagement\)](#), students who attend women's colleges also report the following benefits:

- They are more engaged than their peers at coed institutions.
- They are more likely to experience high levels of academic challenge.
- They engage in more active and collaborative learning.
- They take part in activities that integrate their in-class and outside of class experiences more than their counterparts at coeducational institutions.
- They report greater gains of self-understanding and self-confidence.

Anecdotal, some students report that they are more likely to participate in class, take risks, and challenge themselves academically in a single-sex environment. In addition, students at women's colleges have a higher graduation rate than their peers at coeducational institutions, and they are more likely to go on to achieve an advanced degree.

It's clear to see why so many young women consider women's colleges. With extensive support networks, a challenging academic program, and a classroom environment that values communication and collaboration, women's colleges are a great choice for many students.

What Are the Cons of Attending a Women's College?

There's no doubt that women's colleges have a lot to offer, but they aren't without their deficits.

Some students report that the absence of males in their college classrooms and everyday college life can sometimes feel artificial, leaving them unprepared for life beyond college. Although this certainly isn't everyone's experience, it's clear that some students might feel unprepared to work with men after going to college without them.

In addition, some students at women's colleges feel that the social scene is lacking. Meeting and making friends with males can take significantly more effort, especially if the school is in a rural area.

Finally, most women's colleges are small, liberal arts schools. Few have more than 5,000 students. This isn't necessarily a drawback, but if you have your heart set on a large university, you won't be able to find that in a women's college.

The Bottom Line

A women's college isn't the right choice for everyone, but for young women who feel they'd benefit from a single-sex learning environment or who simply find a single-sex college to be the best fit for them academically, they are a worthwhile and well-respected option. The application process for women's colleges is essentially the same as most other liberal arts colleges, but you should be prepared to discuss why you're interested specifically in a single-sex school.

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Short Bio: Kate Koch-Sundquist is a graduate of Pomona College where she studied sociology, psychology, and writing before going on to receive an M.Ed. from Lesley University. After a few forays into living abroad and afloat (sometimes at the same time), she now makes her home north of Boston where she works as a content writer and, with her husband, raises two young sons who both inspire her and challenge her on a daily basis.