2025

THE NEW IVI

By Emma Whitford, Former Staff. I write about education with a focus on finance and entrepreneurship.

Published Mar 26, 2025, 06:30am EDT, Updated Apr 2, 2025, 10:34am EDT

Add Us On Google

It's impossible to ignore the mounting criticisms of America's most exclusive colleges. These 20 schools—10 public and 10 private—are stepping up to educate the country's brightest students and graduating the talent employers seek.

President Donald Trump's attack on what he and others insist is a "woke" epidemic infecting the nation's higher education system has turned the Ivy League and other elite colleges into pariahs. While still offering rigorous and broad curriculums, these schools have prioritized diversity and inclusion, which the Trump Administration would like to abolish. Trump has not hesitated to wield executive powers, legally and not, to enforce his vision—one that hamstrings research, terminates DEI programs, and prioritizes workforce preparedness.

Hundreds of colleges now face steep federal funding cuts, gutted programs and federal investigations. Even the most fiscally fit universities are staring down four years of financial uncertainty. But Trump's personal beef has mostly centered on the Ancient Eight. An example: Last Wednesday, the Trump administration paused $175 million in funding for his alma mater, the University of Pennsylvania, because the university had allowed transgender athletes to compete in women's sports before the NCAA changed its policy in 2025. The freeze is "just a taste of what could be coming down the pipe" for Penn, a White House spokesperson told Fox Business. That same day, Columbia

University—the epicenter of pro-Palestinian student protests in 2024 that angered alumni, major donors and others—signaled it would comply with a slew of demands from the White House, including suspending and expelling some protestors and putting its Middle Eastern studies department under review. Earlier this month, the Trump administration cut $400 million in federal funding for the university, claiming university officials failed to address antisemitism on campus.

While the ongoing political assault is perhaps the fiercest condemnation of the Ivies, employers share a growing distaste for America's oldest and most venerable colleges. In a *Forbes* survey answered by more than 380 C-suite inhabitants, vice presidents and other managers, 37% said they are less likely to hire an Ivy League graduate than they were five years ago—up from 33% who said the same last year. Another 12% said they would *never* hire an Ivy League graduate. Survey respondents pointed to graduates' attitudes and lack of humility as sticking points. "I believe Ivy League candidates are over valued, and they frequently have a higher than real opinion of themselves," one C-suite-level respondent wrote. "Entry-level job candidates should be "eager to learn, have no ego or be 'stuck-up' because of the school they attended," said another.

So if America's favor is turning away from its most elite private schools, where are employers, students and parents looking instead? For the second year, *Forbes* New Ivies has selected 10 outstanding public universities and 10 top private schools that are attracting the best and the brightest, and graduating students that are outpacing most Ivy Leaguers in the eyes of employers. These colleges are highly selective—applicants have a one in seven chance, or slimmer, to gain admission to one of the private New Ivies, and a 50% chance or less to enroll at one of the 10 mostly large public universities. And, they accept the best—the private New Ivies admit students with a median SAT score of 1530—slightly higher than the nation's largest Ivy, Cornell University, which has a median SAT score of 1520. The public universities, which educate a combined 396,000 students, admit students with a median SAT score of 1410.

The Public New Ivies

INSTITUTION	STATE	UNDERGRAD ENROLLMENT	ACCEPTANCE RATE	50th PERC. SAT	50th PERC. ACT
Georgia Institute of Technology-Main Campus	Georgia	19,888	16%	1450	32
Purdue University-Main Campus	Indiana	41,678	50%	1320	31

The University of Texas at Austin	Texas	43,718	29%	1370	31
United States Military Academy	New York	4,552	14%	1330	31
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign	Illinois	36,970	44%	1410	32
University of Michigan-Ann Arbor	Michigan	33,921	18%	1470	33
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	North Carolina	21,214	19%	1470	32
University of Pittsburgh-Pittsburgh Campus	Pennsylvania	25,319	50%	1360	31
University of Virginia-Main Campus	Virginia	19,791	17%	1490	33
William & Mary	Virginia	7,359	33%	1450	33

Sources: National Center For Education Statistics, college websites.

Forbes

Many of these schools are making their second appearance on our list—Johns Hopkins University, Northwestern University and the University of Michigan, for example, continue to impress. But this year, we welcome six newcomers: Washington University in St Louis, Tufts University in Massachusetts; Purdue University in Indiana; the United States Military Academy at West Point; the University of Pittsburgh; and William & Mary in Virginia.

Of all the public schools, the United States Military Academy, usually referred to as West Point, scored the highest amongst employers. Given the values instilled into West Point cadets—discipline, leadership, and teamwork, to name a few—it's no surprise. It's tough to compare the academy to any others on our list. Instead of students, West Point enrolls cadets. Instead of traditional academics, most classes are taught by military officers, often with combat experience. Tuition is free for all cadets-who graduate as lieutenants in the U.S. Army, and they must serve five years of active duty and three years in the reserves after graduation. Still, West Point has the trappings of a typical undergraduate college—with an undergraduate enrollment of 4,500, it offers 15 men's and nine women's sports teams, a bucolic campus in New York's Hudson Valley, and a range of study options in the arts and sciences, from English and philosophy to physics

and geospatial information science.

For students who are looking for an historic college with centuries-old brick buildings and a bucolic campus, William & Mary, founded in 1693, fits the bill. Of the ten public schools on our list, the Williamsburg, Virginia college is the most Ivy-like. The university enrolls about 7,000 undergraduate students—about a thousand shy of Brown and Princeton—and is older than every American college but Harvard. Primarily undergraduate, most students take a well-rounded arts and science curriculum, and the college is home to the oldest American Greek life organizations. Long-time college counselor, certified educational planner and IECA member Chris Teare thinks of William & Mary as "a great option for more scholarly students who relish academic rigor," compared with a fellow New Ivy, the University of Virginia, which is a "powerhouse pre-professionally and more fully into big-time D1 sports and campus rah-rah."

The two other public New Ivies newcomers—Purdue University and the University of Pittsburgh—better fit the public flagship university mold. Purdue, in West Lafayette, Indiana, enrolls more than 56,000 students (a portion of them who study online), and Pittsburgh enrolls about 35,600 students.

The Private New Ivies

INSTITUTION	STATE	UNDERGRAD ENROLLMENT	ACCEPTANCE RATE	50th PERC. SAT	50th PERC. ACT
Carnegie Mellon University	Pennsylvania	7,497	11%	1540	35
Emory University	Georgia	7,606	11%	1520	33
Georgetown University	District of Columbia	8,670	13%	1500	33
Johns Hopkins University	Maryland	8,654	8%	1550	35
Northwestern University	Illinois	10,210	7%	1530	34
Rice University	Texas	4,712	8%	1550	35

	**Tufts University**	Massachusetts	7,631	10%	1510	34
	**University of Notre Dame**	Indiana	9,157	12%	1500	34
	**Vanderbilt University**	Tennessee	7,284	6%	1540	35
	**Washington University in St Louis**	Missouri	8,821	12%	1540	34

Sources: National Center For Education Statistics, college websites.

Forbes

New to this year's private New Ivies list, and a crown jewel in greater Boston's crowded higher education market, is Tufts University in Somerville, Massachusetts. The hilltop school, whose alumni include Ebay founder Pierre Omidyar, JPMorgan CEO Jamie Dimon and singer-songwriter Tracy Chapman enrolls about 6,877 undergraduates and about 5,500 graduate students and is well-known for its international studies, computer science and pre-med programs. Also joining the list of 10 this year is Washington University in St. Louis, a preeminent research university that enrolls about 7,300 undergraduates and 6,900 graduate students, and is lauded for its pre-med programs and Olin Business School. "Tufts and Wash U have long been immediately in the conversation as 'what's next' for students who want the Ivies but might fall just short," Teare says.

"Their growing reputation has also expanded their applicant pool, attracting students who once focused solely on the Ivies," says Ivy Link founder Adam Nguyen about Tufts, Washington University and William & Mary. In 2024, William & Mary received 17,799 applications—a 25% increase over 2020 numbers. At Washington University, 2024 was the toughest ever for admissions—13% of the university's 27,900 applicants were admitted. "Additionally, there is a rising demand for strong undergraduate research programs and faculty mentorship—areas where these universities excel."

To identify which public and private schools are eclipsing the Ivy League, we started with a list of all degree-granting, four-year public and private, not-for-profit colleges in the United States using the most recent data available from the National Center for Education Statistics. We removed the traditional Ivy schools—Brown, Columbia, Cornell, Dartmouth, Harvard, Penn, Princeton and Yale—as well as the four "Ivy plus"

colleges, Stanford, MIT, Duke and the University of Chicago. To be considered for the New Ivies list, colleges had to meet three criteria. First, size: the private schools must enroll at least 3,500 students, and the public colleges 4,000 students. Second, selectivity: private colleges must admit fewer than 20% of their applicants, and public colleges must admit fewer than 50%. And third, high test scores. The private *Forbes* New Ivies admit students with a median SAT of 1530 and a median ACT of 34. The public schools admit students with a median SAT of 1410 and a median ACT of 32. The schools that met all three criteria were put in front of employers in a survey to subscribers to *Forbes'* C-suite newsletters.

One important caveat: the University of California system—widely considered one of the best state college systems in the country and home to UCLA and the University of California-Berkeley—does not report test scores, and was not considered for this ranking.

Subscribe: Less than $2/wk 5+

America's Top Colleges 2026 | How We Rank America's Best Colleges | Forbes' Top 25 Public Colleges | Forbes' Top 50 Small Colleges | The 25 Colleges With The Highest Payoff

graduates, they are increasingly willing to consider graduates of non-Ivy private colleges and public universities. About a third of Forbes survey respondents say they are more likely to hire graduates from non-Ivy private colleges than they were five years ago, and 38% say the same of public college graduates. Only 6% say they are more likely to hire from the Ivy League. "The gap between graduates from Ivies and other public/private universities is shrinking," says one vice president at a company with more than 5,000 employees. "Public university students seem to exhibit more empathy than others, and passion to innovate and take up steep learning curves to master skills required in current situations is more important."

Four in 10 respondents say the Ivy League schools are doing a worse job at preparing entry-level job candidates than they were five years ago. Three in 10 said the preparation was about the same, and only 8% said the Ivies were improving in that regard. "In recent years, we have intentionally shifted away from hiring graduates of Ivy League institutions," wrote one C-suite respondent. "Over the past five years, Ivy League schools have become environments where groupthink is encouraged, dissent is discouraged, and graduates emerge lacking the resilience, adaptability, and practical skills necessary for success in competitive industries."

Employers were most impressed with the changes at public universities. Forty-two

percent said public colleges were doing a better job at preparing entry-level job candidates than they were five years ago. About 30% said it was the same, and 16% said public colleges were doing a worse job. For the non-Ivy privates, 37% of respondents said the schools were doing a better job at preparing entry-level job candidates, 33% said it was about the same, and 17% said it was getting worse.

Despite high praise from the business world, our New Ivies are not immune to the political firestorm closing in on colleges. Johns Hopkins University, for example, is the highest-ranked school on our list among employers, but it's also the largest recipient of grant funding from the National Institutes of Health—an agency that recently slashed funding for administrative costs related to university research. Johns Hopkins earned an A+ on this year's Forbes Financial Grades, which is based on fiscal year 2023 data, but 40% of its annual revenues come from federal funding. Even with a $13.5 billion endowment, Johns Hopkins may be forced to shutter research programs, freeze hiring and limit the number of graduate students it enrolls if these trends continue. Last week, masked immigration agents arrested a Georgetown University post-doctoral fellow who is in the country legally, accusing him of spreading Hamas propaganda. Similar threats have been made to scholars at a host of other universities, including Brown and Columbia.



FORBES

MORE FROM FORBES

FORBES

Forbes College Financial Grades 2025: America's Strongest And Weakest Schools

By Emma Whitford

FORBES

This Community College Has Ivy League Professors And Is Backed By Sam Altman

By Emma Whitford

FORBES

The New Ivies: Why Smart Kids And Their Cost Conscious Parents Flock To SUNY Binghamton

By Emma Whitford

FORBES

The New Ivies: How Georgia Tech Is Putting Job Placements Over Exclusivity

By Emma Whitford

FORBES

A Growing Side Hustle For American College Grads: Fixing AI's Wrong Answers

By Richard Nieva

Got a tip? Share confidential information with Forbes.

Editorial Standards Reprints & Permissions



By Emma Whitford. I write about business, finance and technology in the K-12 and higher education sectors. Prior to joining Forbes, I worked at Inside Higher Ed as a business and governance reporter, and before that I worked as a digital producer for Politico. I graduated from...

Read More

ADVERTISEMENT

More From Forbes