

# TOWN&COUNTRY

## The 15 Colleges With the Best Return on Investment

Spoiler alert: only four Ivies made the list.

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In an age where the premium placed on the pursuit of a quality college education is higher than ever ([quite literally](#)), there are many factors that go into deciding which university justifies its price. Is it Ivy League prestige? [Ivy-adjacent cachet](#)? Academic excellence or [NCAA winnings](#)? All are worthy considerations but perhaps what is really most important is whether the school [will be worth the investment](#) in 10, 15, 20 years' time. Will the six-figure price of these elite educations put students on track for the C-suite of a Fortune 500 company—or back to living in their parents' basement?

Since 2019, Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce [has ranked 4,500 colleges](#) by their return on investment, calculating their net present value (NPV) at various intervals, from 10 years after graduation up to the 40-year mark. (A measurement of how much value a college degree adds, the formula for NPVs takes into account what the average graduates of an institution will have cumulatively made within a certain number of years, minus the cost of their degrees.)

For more clarity on the subject we asked the advisors at [IvyWise](#) to analyze the data and narrow it down to a list of the top 15 colleges and universities with the best ROI. The consultants weighed a myriad factors, such as the cost of tuition; the instructional expenditure per student (IEPS), an underrated but useful metric showing how much a school spends on education; and the percentage of degrees awarded in STEM subjects, which, unsurprisingly, account for higher salaries. Criteria was further narrowed down to four-year, bachelor's degree institutions, while looking at just the 20-year NPV (shorter-term figures tend to have a positive bias towards colleges that cost less). The results, ranked in order from highest ROI, are below. Spoiler alert: only four Ivy League institutions made the list.

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# 1

## Massachusetts Institute of Technology



Boston, MA

20-year NPV: **\$1,881,000**

Acceptance rate: 4.52%

Sticker price: \$82,676

IEPS: \$81,122

STEM %: 87%

“MIT is known not only for its rigorous programs in science, engineering, and technology, but also for its strong emphasis on career readiness, industry connections, and experiential learning. Nearly all students participate in the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program (UROP), working directly with mentors and faculty on real research, and a majority of them complete internships while at MIT (an impressive 75% of the class of 2024). Such hands-on experiences not only enhance learning but also lead directly to employment opportunities, which are further enhanced by MIT’s robust alumni network. All of these factors, combined with the school’s focus on practical experience and financial accessibility, solidifies its reputation as a leader in delivering a high ROI.”

## 2

# Harvey Mudd College





Claremont, CA

20-year NPV: \$1,819,000

Acceptance rate: 12.66%

Sticker price: \$96,534

IEPS: \$31,554

STEM %: 79%

“Harvey Mudd College distinguishes itself as a premier STEM-focused institution dedicated exclusively to undergraduate education, maintaining an intimate enrollment of under 1,000 students. This small size fosters a close-knit academic community, while membership in the Claremont Colleges consortium unlocks access to a broad array of resources, including cross-registration for courses, diverse extracurricular activities, and shared facilities across the neighboring campuses. More than half of the class of 2024 entered the workforce securing a median starting salary of \$117,500—prominent employers include Microsoft, Amazon, and Google, highlighting the strong demand for Harvey Mudd alumni in the tech industry—while around 30% of grads pursued advanced degrees at top-tier institutions, with many receiving full fellowships.”

# 3

## California Institute of Technology

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Pasadena, CA

20-year NPV: \$1,719,000

Acceptance rate: 3.14%

Sticker price: \$89,199

IEPS: \$112,738

STEM %: 100%

“Caltech is renowned for its intimate learning environment with a 3:1 student-to-faculty ratio, one of the lowest in the nation. This close-knit academic setting fosters strong mentorship and collaboration between students and faculty, and a rigorous core curriculum integrates hands-on STEM courses with studies in the humanities and social sciences to cultivate well-rounded scientists and engineers. This comprehensive approach has contributed to an impressive legacy: As of 2025, 47 Caltech alumni, faculty, and postdoctoral scholars have been awarded a total of 48 Nobel Prizes, reflecting Caltech’s significant impact on global scientific advancements. Graduates achieve remarkable outcomes that underscore the institution’s high ROI. Take the class of 2023: 43% pursued graduate or professional studies, with 74% gaining acceptance to one of their top-choice programs, and 44% secured full-time employment, with a median starting salary between \$110,000 and \$119,000.”

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## Olin College of Engineering



Needham, MA

20-year NPV: **\$1,709,000**

Acceptance rate: 21.66%

Sticker price: \$88,782

IEPS: \$41,079

STEM %: 100%

“With a mission to reinvent engineering education, Olin has become a pioneer in project-based, student-centered learning. Everyone graduates with an engineering degree, with concentrations available in bioengineering, computing, design, robotics, and sustainability. Collaboration is core to the Olin experience, and the curriculum emphasizes teamwork, creativity, and hands-on problem-solving from day one. The college’s small size means that students enjoy an incredibly close-knit academic community, with a student-to-faculty ratio of 9:1, but they also benefit from the college’s partnerships with neighboring institutions like Babson (see #9 below) and Wellesley, expanding their access to courses, clubs, and events beyond engineering. Career outcomes reflect Olin’s forward-thinking approach: The class of 2023 reported an 89% placement rate within six months of graduation, with grads either going on to roles at the likes of Apple, Johns Hopkins, and Procter & Gamble, or continuing their studies at top grad schools. And thanks to a founding endowment that provides financial assistance to all students regardless of need, Olin offers one of the most generous merit-based awards in the country.”

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## Princeton University





Princeton, NJ

20-year NPV: \$1,635,000

Acceptance rate: 4.62%

Sticker price: \$88,668

IEPS: \$70,945

STEM %: 48%

“As one of the nine colonial colleges founded before the American Revolution, Princeton’s early curriculum emphasized the arts and theology, preparing graduates for leadership roles in academia and public service. Today, it offers a wide array of programs, with nearly half of its students pursuing degrees in STEM fields. Public and international affairs, economics, computer science, politics, and history, are among the most popular concentrations. The Princeton experience also fosters a deep sense of community and school spirit, an enduring connection that is exemplified by the annual Reunions Weekend, which draws thousands of alumni back to campus. This tradition contributes to Princeton’s impressive alumni participation in giving campaigns. In addition, Princeton’s substantial endowment—reported at **\$34.1 billion** in 2024, which translates to about \$3.71 million per student—underscores the university’s financial strength and enables it to offer generous aid packages, including full rides for students from families earning up to \$100,000 annually.”

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# Stanford University



Stanford, CA

20-year NPV: **\$1,630,000**

Acceptance rate: 3.61%

Sticker price: \$92,373

IEPS: \$124,493

STEM %: 54%

“Proximity to Silicon Valley offers Stanford students unparalleled access to internships and employment opportunities in the tech industry. While many enter with undecided majors, a significant portion ultimately pursue degrees in the STEM field. This trend aligns with the university’s strong emphasis on innovation and entrepreneurship, contributing to its reputation as a breeding ground for tech pioneers. Financially, Stanford demonstrates a substantial commitment to its students, with a \$2 million endowment-per-student ratio, which enables the school to invest significantly in their education and offer generous financial aid packages. Beyond top-tier academics, Stanford also offers a vibrant campus life and a strong athletic program that enhances the undergrad experience and fosters a close-knit community.”

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## University of Pennsylvania





Philadelphia, PA

20-year NPV: **\$1,557,000**

Acceptance rate: 5.40%

Sticker price: \$91,112

IEPS: \$61,594

STEM %: 30%

“Founded in 1740 by Benjamin Franklin, the University of Pennsylvania has long embodied a philosophy of integrating liberal arts education with practical skills. Students can choose from 90 majors, including several coordinated dual-degree programs that bridge disciplines across its four undergraduate schools. For example, the Huntsman Program in International Studies and Business emphasizes proficiency in a foreign language and a deep understanding of global cultures, preparing students for impactful careers on the international stage. This rigorous four-year program awards graduates both a degree in international studies from the College of Arts and Sciences and a degree in economics from the Wharton School. Penn’s commitment to career readiness is evident in the achievements of its graduates: 91.8% of the class of 2024 were either employed full-time (mostly in finance, consulting, and tech with a median starting salary of \$100,200) or furthering their education.”

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# Carnegie Mellon University



Pittsburgh, PA

20-year NPV: **\$1,527,000**

Acceptance rate: 11.66%

Sticker price: \$86,990

IEPS: \$34,891

STEM

“A global research university renowned for its STEM programs and with a student-to-faculty ratio of 7:1, Carnegie Mellon fosters an environment of close collaboration and personalized learning, enabling students to develop the critical skills necessary for success in their chosen fields. Its emphasis on interdisciplinary research and innovation has positioned it among the top universities in the world for producing venture-backed startup founders. Aside from its celebrated STEM and business programs, CMU also boasts a distinguished reputation in the fine and performing arts. The top-notch School of Drama has produced alumni who have collectively earned 64 Tony Awards.”

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## Babson College



Wellesley, MA

20-year NPV: **\$1,523,000**

Acceptance rate: 17.00%

Sticker price: \$80,906

IEPS: \$14,548

STEM %: 3%

“Babson College has consistently been ranked as a global leader in entrepreneurship education for more than two decades. The college offers 26 concentrations, primarily within the business realm, blending rigorous business curricula with liberal arts to foster well-rounded, innovative leaders. A hallmark of Babson’s experiential learning approach is the yearlong Foundations of Management and Entrepreneurship course, where freshmen collaboratively launch and manage new ventures, gaining firsthand experience in teamwork, risk-taking, and project execution. This emphasis on practical experience translates into remarkable career outcomes. For the third consecutive year, the class of 2024 reported the highest starting salary in Babson’s history, averaging \$77,681.”

# 10

## Bentley University





Waltham, MA

20-year NPV: **\$1,485,000**

Acceptance rate: 45.05%

Sticker price: \$84,820

IEPS: \$14,145

STEM %: 6%

“Bentley University, which was founded in 1917, is renowned for its business-focused education, offering a curriculum that integrates these disciplines with liberal arts to prepare students for success in a dynamic economy. Along with a location that provides easy access to Boston for internships and experiential learning, Bentley’s Pulsifer Career Development Center has consistently been recognized for its excellence in career services (ranked no. 1 in the nation by the *Princeton Review* last year). This commitment to career readiness is reflected in the impressive outcomes for graduates: 99% of the class of 2024 were employed—with a median starting salary of \$72,000—or attending grad school within six months of graduation. Plus, Bentley is dedicated to fostering leadership among women through initiatives like the Women’s Leadership Program (WLP), which offers workshops, mentorship, and corporate engagement opportunities.”

# 11

## Georgia Institute of Technology



Atlanta, GA

20-year NPV: **\$1,417,000**

Acceptance rate: 12.74% (overall)

Sticker price: \$26,334 (in-state); \$49,734 (out-of-state)

IEPS: \$10,243

STEM %: 80%

“Georgia Tech is one of the nation’s leading public research universities and consistently ranks among the top institutions for total R&D expenditures. The university’s co-op and internship programs provide students with invaluable hands-on experience, bridging the gap between academic theories and real-world applications. Its dedication to career readiness is evident in its high stats for career placement. In 2024, the *Princeton Review* named Georgia Tech the no. 1 Best Value Public University, highlighting its exceptional return on investment for students. The university is also a pillar of the Georgia Research Alliance, a foundation for the state’s economic development. In fact, for fiscal year 2023, the school’s economic impact was measured at \$5.3 billion.”

# 12

## Claremont McKenna College





Claremont, CA

20-year NPV: **\$1,407,000**

Acceptance rate: 9.59%

Sticker price: \$94,310

IEPS: \$30,917

STEM %: 22%

“Claremont McKenna is a highly selective liberal arts school (and a member of the Claremont Colleges consortium) known for its leadership focus and distinctive academic programs, like the Robert Day School of Economics and Finance and the Marian Miner Cook Athenaeum. Eighty-nine percent of students complete at least one internship before graduating, and the college’s strong alumni network and support systems (like the Soll Center for Student Opportunity) contribute to consistently strong career outcomes. For the class of 2024, more than 91% reported being employed or enrolled in grad school within six months. Popular fields include accounting and financial services, nonprofit and social enterprise, consulting, and technology and entrepreneurship. The median starting salary for the class of 2024 is approximately \$80,000, with the most popular employers being JPMorgan, Deloitte, and Microsoft. Though deeply academic, the CMC campus culture also celebrates leadership, collaboration, and social engagement in which students are encouraged to take risks, explore ideas, and embrace a balance of intellectual rigor and real-world impact.”

# 13

## Stevens Institute of Technology





Hoboken, NJ

20-year NPV: **\$1,404,000**

Acceptance rate: 47.58%

Sticker price: \$85,606

IEPS: \$12,718

STEM %: 81%

“Located just across the Hudson River from Manhattan, Stevens was founded as the first American institution dedicated solely to mechanical engineering and has since evolved into a premier research university renowned for its excellence in STEM fields and business education. The school fosters an environment that emphasizes technological innovation and entrepreneurship, positioning students at the forefront of cutting-edge research and industry developments. It has demonstrated significant growth in its research endeavors: in 2023, the university’s externally sponsored research expenditures soared by 23%, marking a new record and underscoring its commitment to advancing knowledge. The class of 2024 reported impressive outcomes, with 96.8% employed or enrolled in continuing education within six months of graduation. Those employed reported an average salary of \$84,800 and nearly three-quarters opted to remain in the New York City metro area. Stevens’s dedication to providing value-driven education has consistently earned it a place on the *Princeton Review*’s lists of colleges based on both best value and career placement.”

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# Harvard University



20-year NPV: **\$1,389,000**

Acceptance rate: 3.65%

Sticker price: \$86,926

IEPS: \$43,746

STEM %: 42%

“Harvard has long been associated with prestige, tradition, and academic excellence. With about 50 undergraduate concentrations and an expansive network of graduate and professional schools, students benefit from unparalleled academic flexibility and access to world-class faculty. Many undergraduates participate in research, internships, independent projects, and global experiences during their time in Cambridge, but the real differentiator? A vast alumni network and deep connections across nearly every sector. Graduates land jobs at top employers in finance, consulting, tech, government, academia, and the nonprofit world—40% of the class of 2024 reported salaries above \$110,000. And thanks to its multibillion-dollar endowment, Harvard offers one of the most generous financial aid programs in the country: Families earning under \$100,000 typically pay nothing, while those earning under \$200,000 only pay for room and board.”

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## Columbia University



New York, NY

20-year NPV: **\$1,386,000**

Acceptance rate: 4.29%

Sticker price: \$88,750

IEPS: \$103,877

STEM %: 41%

“Blending historical prestige with modern relevance, particularly in fields like economics, English, computer science, history, mathematics, neuroscience, and political science, Columbia offers an Ivy League education with unparalleled access to NYC’s global industries, research opportunities, and cultural institutions. Undergraduates benefit from the university’s renowned Core Curriculum, which fosters critical thinking, communication, and cross-disciplinary learning. But the value of a Columbia education extends well beyond the classroom: Students regularly intern at top organizations across the city, and nearly 90% of graduates report meaningful employment or continued study within six months of getting their diplomas. The class of 2024 saw a median starting salary of \$85,000, with many entering competitive industries such as finance, consulting, media, healthcare, and tech. The alumni network is one of the largest and most active in the world, offering valuable mentorship, networking, and job placement support. Columbia’s commitment to affordability is also notable: Families earning under \$66,000 are not expected to contribute toward the cost of attendance, and the university meets 100% of demonstrated financial need—without loans.”



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