

The case for small private colleges during COVID-19's fall of 2020

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Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, students are determining what their next steps will be for fall. There is good data showing that students are delaying, considering their alternatives, including staying closer to home, spending less money on tuition and being prepared for online and hybrid learning that may take them to the classroom some days, but not others, thusly spacing out their courses in a way that continues social distancing.

It is true everyone is eager to return to "normal," and the Pennsylvania Secretary of Education has indicated that he wants schools to reopen in the fall, subject to safety measures, of course. Guidance has been forthcoming. For now, most schools including colleges and universities are in the final planning stages for reopening and mitigating risk for fall 2020. Generally speaking, Pennsylvania's governor and the Secretary of Health are working to ensure each county remains open safely, such as through an all-times-in-public mask mandate.

From the college students' perspective, most students want to get on with life. They are looking forward to their freshman year of college since many missed out when their senior year of high school was cut short on graduation ceremonies and proms.

The question presented then is where to go in the fall? Lots of people don't know this, but Pennsylvania's private nonprofit colleges and universities have more to offer than meets the eye. The average student loan debt for bachelor's degree graduates of PA's private nonprofit colleges has been lower for five out of the last six years than graduates of public institutions. Almost every undergraduate student attending one of PA's independent nonprofit schools receives financial aid grants, averaging almost \$23,000 per student per year. And graduation rates of PA's independent nonprofit colleges have a record that makes their strong value apparent:

Graduation rates at independent (private) nonprofit colleges are 62% in four years and 74% in six years. That's better than the rates at state-related (51% in four years, 71% in six years) and State System of Higher Education (40% in four year, 58% in six years) schools.

Students who are looking for the closer-to-home/costs-less/safe-environment combination during COVID-19 should be looking to PA's independent nonprofit colleges, such as those colleges who are members of the Association of Independent Colleges & Universities of Pennsylvania.

Manor College is a proud member of AICUP and we are also proud to be the best-priced local and private residential college in PA with an amazing 12:1 student teacher ratio, which gives us the advantage of offering personalized attention to our students. We've been rated by Niche.com as among the safest colleges in PA, recognized by the New York Times for being the best in the area for intergenerational (economic) mobility, and we offer 50+ bachelor's, associate's and certificate programs. In addition, Manor's faculty made a concerted effort to reduce the costs of books by using open educational resources, which then became, starting this fall, i.e., the fall of 2020, all books included with tuition, for all but three of our 50+ programs.

All in all, when students and parents/guardians are evaluating the total picture of higher education, they shouldn't just think about public institutions as the low-cost option, because the data are clear: students coming out of independent nonprofit colleges wind up with less debt (as well as the lowest loan default rates), stronger odds of graduation, and they go on to careers that are meaningful for the graduates and their future industries.