

Why the University of Chicago? – UChicago – College Review

Essentials:

Over the years, UChicago has earned a reputation for attracting a certain type of student more concerned with academics than the social aspects of the college experience. However, UChicago now attracts many more well-rounded students from various backgrounds and it is getting to be harder to easily characterize the student body other than to say it is more diverse than ever before. That being said, UChicago presents students an intense, fast-paced and demanding academic experience with a tremendous workload. A student has to be ready to be academically challenged as never before and at times be humbled by the demands of the school. The type of student that thrives in this environment tends to be one that loves learning for the sake of learning and takes to heart the joys of pursuing academic interests.

To assist in this pursuit of knowledge, the award-winning faculty is easily accessible to the undergraduate. It is very possible to develop working relationships with world-class scholars and experience a very high level of instruction in the classroom.

There is no overall agreement or consensus regarding the undergraduate UChicago experience from current students or graduates of the school. More than most of the other top ranked schools, UChicago evokes strong feelings both positively and negatively from students regarding the college experience offered by the school. The merits of its hyper intense academic environment, the type of students attending the University and the quality of student life are all a matter of debate. The debate often centers on a negative portrayal of the dominant type of student that attends the school which is quite often characterized as “nerdy” and socially challenged. Students have expressed contrasting opinions on whether UChicago offers a punishing and grueling four years or an enlightening and exceptional college experience to be relished. A prospective student needs to spend extra time researching and visiting UChicago to determine whether the school will satisfy their individual needs.

Strength of the School:

Since the founding of UChicago in 1892, the University has earned a stellar reputation of academic and research excellence. UChicago has been home to over 85 Nobel Prize winners, over 200 Guggenheim fellows, 30 MacArthur fellows and 20 Pulitzer Prize winners.

UChicago is home to the undergraduate College plus a number of leading graduate and professional schools including three of the nation’s top professional schools in law, business and medicine plus the famous graduate program in economics. There are more than 5,300 undergraduates and a combined total of over 15,000 students attend the University. UChicago is a great liberal arts college within a leading research university.

UChicago is an urban school situated in Chicago's Hyde Park community with a distinctively attractive 215 acre campus dominated by architecture in the Gothic style modeled after the famous English

campuses of Oxford and Cambridge. The quality of the libraries on campus has often been praised for the way they enhance the academic experience. In addition, the campus has been designated as a botanical garden. The beauty of the campus is admired by many and provides a great and distinctive setting for a major academic powerhouse. The quality of life for a college student in the immediate Hyde Park neighborhood earns mixed reviews, however, downtown Chicago is only a short 7 mile ride by public transportation and can be easily accessed.

Academics:

- The core foundation of UChicago's excellent academic experience emulates from the award-winning world-class faculty. An important distinction at the University is the high degree of accessibility by the faculty to the undergraduates including freshman. Many professors tend to be proactive in encouraging undergraduate students to interact with them. UChicago's very accessible and greatly respected professors tend to motivate students to an even greater degree by providing that extra level of encouragement and guidance.

- The UChicago curriculum has three main components that need to be completed for graduation: general education requirements which is a core curriculum, a major and electives which can be completed for a minor plus two years of foreign language study leading to tested competence in that language. UChicago operates on a quarterly basis where a semester lasts only 10 weeks. A student must complete credit for 42 of these quarter courses for graduation. UChicago grants either a Bachelor of Sciences or Bachelor of Arts in 50 majors and 29 minors.

- A student is expected to take four courses per semester and typically completes three semesters a year. The University operates on this quarterly basis which accelerates the pace of courses adding to the overall academic challenge of the school.

- All students must complete 15 credits in the common core curriculum which consists of courses covering the Humanities, Civilization Studies, the Arts, Natural and Mathematical Sciences and the Social Sciences. UChicago's goal is to graduate a well-rounded student. A consensus opinion of the students is that all the common core courses are academically challenging and there is no way to avoid rigorous coursework for either the liberal arts or sciences major.

- Economics and biology are the two most popular majors followed by Political Science, Mathematics, English Language/Literature, Public Policy, and Physics.

Student/ Social Life:

- A student's life at UChicago is dominated by the demands of a very challenging academic workload. The school does not have a reputation for offering a vibrant social life, however, if a student maintains a proper balance between their academic and social life then the school does offer many opportunities to have a rewarding overall college experience.

- Most student life takes place on campus or in the surrounding Hyde Park area; however, it is typical for students to take advantage a few times a month and especially on weekends of visits into downtown Chicago and other neighborhoods as an occasional escape from campus life. 60% of students live on campus while the rest tend to live in the surrounding Hyde Park community. In addition, the majority of the faculty also lives in the local community.

- The residential system that UChicago has instituted starting for the student as early as freshman orientation goes a long way to create an environment where a sizable number of good, close friends can be made. There are 10 different residence halls on campus ranging in style from modern to traditional. Two of the residence halls are reserved exclusively for upper-class students while all eight others have a mix of students not divided by class year.

- A residence hall is separated into smaller houses of which there are 37 in total. The average size of a house is 70 students. A house is intended as the functioning social unit for the students and is lead by Residents Heads to provide a degree of guidance. The house system plays a dominant role in the daily lives of students as they will eat, socialize, play sports, share academic experiences and challenges and just hang out with one another within their assigned house.

- Houses take on distinctive personalities and a competitive spirit often develops between members of various houses.

- It starts with freshman orientation week where students are immediately assigned to a house and the process of integration into the system begins. A major shortcoming of the system is that there is no guarantee that house members can stay together after freshman year on campus. Housing assignments can potentially break up strong bonds made between students so often students choose to move into housing together in the Hyde Park community. This is the major reason why so many students choose to live off campus.

- There are fraternities and sororities on campus that attract around 10% of the student body; however, they play a minor role in the social life of students.

- While the UChicago supports 19 teams on the Division III level, intercollegiate sports plays a very minor role in a typical student's life. The sports teams are not often followed by the students. Students are more likely to play intramural sports where there is active participation by many.

- Finding an extracurricular activity to participate in is no challenge with over 400 activities officially recognized by the school. There is a type of group and club for everyone and everything including debate, student government, student publications, University Theater and a radio station.

- The annual four-day scavenger hunt that takes place Mother's Day Weekend in May is a noteworthy event that is well known beyond the University. The event has become legendary because of its unusual nature. Typically teams compete to find 300 items from a list that includes all types of unusual things to be found and various tasks to be completed. Completion of the vast list of things to be done and found by the individual teams is evaluated by student judges and points are awarded to determine a winner. Each year's scavenger list is a well kept secret and has evolved in uniqueness and complexity over time.

Location:

Hyde Park is located on the South Side of Chicago on the shores of Lake Michigan only a short ride by public transportation from downtown Chicago. Hyde Park and the adjacent neighborhood of Kenwood directly north, have been the home to many prominent African-Americans including President Barack Obama, former Chicago Mayor Harold Washington, and former US Sen. Carol Moseley Braun. Hyde Park is a very racially diverse neighborhood that has gone through many of the changes experienced by other urban neighborhoods over the last decades with cycles of decline, revitalization and renewal. UChicago has always taken on a role as a prominent anchor of the neighborhood and has sponsored many urban renewal efforts. These projects have often been judged as controversial over the years and there exists a degree of uneasy relations between the neighborhood and the University.

The neighborhood today is often a study in contrasts between poorer residents and well-to-do residents including students and faculty with the issue of personal security on people's minds. The neighborhood is not especially well regarded as college student friendly. Hyde Park stands as a gateway to the predominantly disadvantaged and troubled African American South Side of Chicago. Chicago's South Side has often been in the news recently for all the wrong reasons. Violent crime and daily shootings in the South Side are daily headlines with the City of Chicago working to gain control over a troubling situation. UChicago is somewhat removed from these incidents, however, this level of violent crime is of paramount concern for any resident of the city.

Don't go to UChicago if:

Your first priority is not a love of learning and the pursuit of mastering your selected areas of academic interest. UChicago is a school academically challenging enough to humble the very best students; however, a student will receive in return among the very best undergraduate college educations available anywhere. If a social life plays a more dominant role in your life compared to library and study time, UChicago is not the right school for you. Attending UChicago also means you are willing to attend a University located in an urban environment facing some challenges. Additionally keep in mind, Chicago's nickname is the Windy City and it is known for very cold and snowy winter weather.

UChicago Interview – College Specific Questions to Ask the Interviewer:

- What overall role did the residential system play in your college experience?
- What type of students are the best matches for UChicago?
- How would you rate Hyde Park and Chicago as college towns?
- What was the experience of the annual scavenger hunt like?
- How do you rate the overall academic experience?

- How would you rate the quality of student life compared to other academically elite universities?

University of Chicago Quick Facts:

UChicago General Website:

<http://www.uchicago.edu/>

UChicago Financial Aid:

<https://collegeadmissions.uchicago.edu/costs/>

UChicago Campus Maps:

<http://maps.uchicago.edu/index.shtml>

UChicago Nickname: Maroons

UChicago Athletics:

<http://athletics.uchicago.edu/>

UChicago Undergraduates: 5,300

UChicago Famous Alumni:

Edwin Hubble

Katharine Graham

Carl Sagan

Ed Asner

Philip Glass

Eliot Ness

Mike Nichols

Susan Sontag