

Chapter 1: Introduction

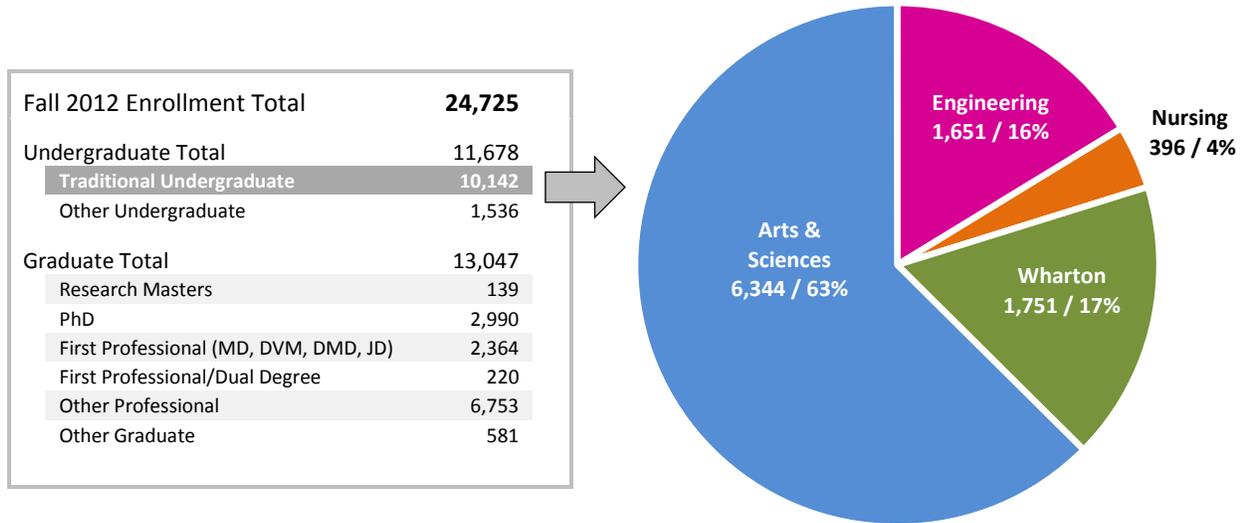
Undergraduate Education at Penn

The University of Pennsylvania is a private, research-intensive university located in West Philadelphia. Penn traces its origin to 1740 and continues to pursue the principles of its founder, Benjamin Franklin: invention, outreach, entrepreneurship, innovation, and the pragmatic unity of theory and practice. Penn's educational offerings balance the arts and sciences with the professions. Undergraduate degree programs for traditional students are offered through four schools: the [School of Arts and Sciences](#), the [School of Engineering and Applied Science](#), the [School of Nursing](#), and the [Wharton School](#). Graduate and professional programs are offered in these four schools, as well as in the Annenberg School for Communication, the School of Dental Medicine, the School of Design, the Graduate School of Education, the Law School, the Perelman School of Medicine, the School of Social Policy & Practice, and the School of Veterinary Medicine. Undergraduate programs for non-traditional students are offered through the School of Nursing and through the College of Liberal and Professional Studies, a division of the School of Arts and Sciences. All of Penn's undergraduate programs and most of its graduate and professional programs use course units (CUs), not semester hours, as a general measure of academic work and progress toward a degree.

There are several [coordinated dual-degree programs](#) that give students opportunities to pursue curricula offered jointly by two Penn schools and receive degrees from both schools. The undergraduate offerings include a number of health-related programs that benefit from close ties to the University of Pennsylvania Health System, which includes the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania Hospital, the Penn Presbyterian Medical Center, Penn Medicine Rittenhouse, the Perelman Center for Advanced Medicine, and a network of hospitals and outpatient centers throughout the region. The School of Veterinary Medicine has two hospitals—the Ryan Veterinary Hospital in Philadelphia and the New Bolton Center in Chester County—and the Schools of Dental and Veterinary Medicine have clinical practices in Philadelphia and in the surrounding region.

In fall 2012, 24,725 students attended Penn, including 10,142 traditional undergraduates and 1,535 other undergraduates (Figure 1.1). There were 11,092 full-time graduate/professional students. In Academic Year 2011-2012, 7,847 degrees were conferred, with 2,987 going to traditional undergraduates. The Self-Study focused on the experience and education of traditional undergraduates.

Figure 1.1
Traditional Undergraduate Enrollment by School



Undergraduate applicants identify on their applications which school or coordinated dual-degree program they wish to attend. Students may apply to only one school or dual-degree program, although students applying to one of Penn’s highly competitive dual-degree programs may elect to indicate a single-degree program for which they would like to be considered if they are not selected for the dual-degree program. Penn received 31,218 applications for admission to its traditional undergraduate programs for the Class of 2016. Of those applicants, 3,935 (12.43 percent) were offered admission. Approximately 12 percent of the first-year undergraduate class are international students, and approximately 40 percent are domestic students who are African American/Black, Hispanic/Latino/a, Asian/Pacific Islander, or Native American/Alaska Native.

Each of the four undergraduate schools has a specific mission, offers its own curriculum, and has a distinctive structure of administration and oversight of undergraduate education.

The [College of Arts and Sciences](#) is the division of the School of Arts and Sciences that serves traditional undergraduate students. The College is committed to providing a broad education that lays a durable foundation for critical and creative thinking. Its curriculum emphasizes the liberal arts through general education requirements: seven sectors designed to provide breadth and foundational approaches (writing, language, analysis, and culture). Each sector and foundational approach offers specifically designated courses from which students can fulfill their requirements. Each sector and approach is overseen by a faculty committee; general oversight of the curriculum and relevant policies is the purview of the Committee

on Undergraduate Education and the Curriculum Committee. Each College student is also required to complete a major (ranging from 12-19 CUs), overseen by individual departments and programs.

The mission of the School of Engineering and Applied Science is to prepare its graduates for technological leadership in engineering and applied science, as well as in such other fields as medicine, business, and law in which creativity, critical quantitative thinking, effective communication skills, and a strong commitment to humane values are essential. Its undergraduate curriculum has distribution-style liberal arts requirements, engineering core math and science requirements (which vary somewhat according to the student's major), and majors overseen by departments. Course Planning Guides exist for each program to guide faculty and students through the curricula.

The School of Nursing is committed to teaching the art and science of nursing, as well as creating opportunities for service, practice, leadership, and research. Its undergraduate curriculum has a liberal arts distribution-type requirement comprising five sectors, writing, and foreign language. In keeping with current and anticipated changes in health care delivery, the undergraduate program emphasizes preparation for nursing practice across health care settings—ranging from acute care, ambulatory, and long-term care—and across population groups. Clinical sites enable students to practice health promotion and disease prevention strategies in community settings with diverse populations. A formal Plan of Study guides students' timing of courses and clinical experiences.

The Wharton School seeks to cultivate a community of scholars who will transform the world as citizens and leaders of the global marketplace. Wharton offers a broad set of academic options that allow students to combine studies in business with a minor or dual degree in subject areas offered by the other undergraduate schools. Its undergraduate curriculum has distribution-style liberal arts requirements, common business fundamentals and breadth requirements overseen by the Wharton Undergraduate Division, and a set of concentrations (typically 4 CUs) overseen by individual departments. Wharton's integrated business and liberal arts curriculum, beginning in the freshman year, provides a solid foundation in business fundamentals. The program also gives students a strong global perspective and insights into other forces that shape the context of business. Finally, the program develops the teamwork and communication skills necessary for effective leadership. After completing the core, students select a concentration: a cluster of four courses in a particular discipline.

While the four undergraduate schools provide the basic structure for the undergraduate experience at Penn, there are a number of central units and programs that organize academic and student services. The [Division of the Vice Provost for University Life](#) oversees student affairs, including [Career Services](#), [Counseling and Psychological Services](#), the [Greenfield Intercultural Center](#), [Student Health Service](#), the [Weingarten Learning Resources Center](#), and a number of other activities and community programs. The Division includes [Student Intervention Services](#), which handles student emergencies and critical incidents and works closely with other student service offices, school administrators, instructors, and the Division of Public Safety. The [Vice Provost for Education](#) oversees academic programs that serve undergraduates, including [College Houses and Academic Services](#), the [Center for Undergraduate Research and Fellowships](#), and the [Weiss Tech House](#). The [Office of Student Conduct](#), which responds

to reports of academic dishonesty and other student misconduct on behalf of the University, reports to the Vice Provost for Education.

The responsibility for the coordination, planning, and institutional assessment of undergraduate education resides with the Council of Undergraduate Deans. The Council is chaired by the Vice Provost for Education and consists of the four undergraduate deans (the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education of the School of Engineering and Applied Science, the Associate Dean for Academic Programs of the School of Nursing, and the Vice Dean of the Wharton School for the Undergraduate Division), the Vice Provost for University Life, the Dean of Admissions, the Faculty Director of College Houses and Academic Services, the Assistant Vice President for Institutional Research and Analysis, and the Chair of the Student Committee on Undergraduate Education (SCUE).

The Council coordinates the activities of the undergraduate schools and other units responsible for undergraduate education at Penn and advises the Provost on critical and emerging issues related to undergraduates. It is supported by the Undergraduate Working Group, consisting of representatives of the offices on the Council of Undergraduate Deans, which investigates issues or concerns at the direction of the Council and facilitates communication and coordination among the undergraduate schools and other units responsible for undergraduate education at Penn.

Self-Study Process and Report

In presenting this Self-Study Report, Penn followed the direction of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education to rely on existing resources and identify the topics most useful to the institution. Penn followed the selected topics model, choosing undergraduate education as its focus; this selection complements the focus on graduate education in Penn's most recent Self-Study in 2004. The topic of undergraduate education also addresses MSCHE's request, in accepting our Periodic Review Report in 2009, that Penn document in its next decennial self-study "that in the School of Arts and Sciences 1) assessment of student learning has been implemented in all departments and programs and 2) assessment results are used to improve teaching and learning." The University's administration, both centrally and in each school, engages continuously in strategic planning, institutional research, and assessment activities regarding the educational experiences of Penn's undergraduates. The Self-Study extends and intensifies these ongoing assessment and planning efforts.

This Self-Study Report is the outcome of a process that began in 2009 with the Periodic Review Report and continued through fall 2013, when a draft of the Self-Study Report was widely disseminated across the Penn community. Two decisions made early in the planning process gave focus and structure to the Self-Study: first, to follow the selected topics model with undergraduate education as the topic; second, to have an early document review that allowed the Self-Study to focus entirely on undergraduate education as it relates to MSCHE's *Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education*.

Because the Self-Study focused on assessing undergraduate education, all of its chapters cover *Standard 7: Institutional Assessment* and *Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning* as they pertain to undergraduate

education. In particular, *Chapter 7: Assessment of Student Learning* focuses on *Standard 14*. Other chapters address standards as they relate to undergraduate education as follows:

- *Chapter 2: Access and Equity* covers *Standard 8: Student Admissions and Retention* and *Standard 9: Student Support Services*;
- Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6 cover *Standard 11: Educational Offerings*;
- *Chapter 8: Finance and Administration* covers *Standard 2: Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal*.

MSCHE standards that are not addressed in the Self-Study or that pertain to graduate and professional study will be covered by a separate document review.

Penn has taken the Self-Study as an opportunity to articulate key priorities related to undergraduate education, examine complex questions about how those priorities are understood and evaluated, and offer future plans and aspirations related to those priorities. The key questions articulated at the beginning of the Study were:

- What are the goals of a Penn undergraduate education?
- How do the programmatic activities central to Penn's mission impact student learning?
- How should the assessment of undergraduate education at the school and program levels, especially the assessment of student learning, inform a larger vision for assessment of undergraduate education at Penn?
- What data and information are important in assessing Penn's undergraduate education?
- What analyses of data and information about Penn's undergraduate education should be performed on an ongoing basis and how should such analyses be shared with the University community?

Given that MSCHE expects broad engagement with the campus community, it was critical to engage faculty and students in the Self-Study. Penn therefore structured the Self-Study process to maximize the involvement of faculty and students, while defining a clear role for administrators who are central to each area of study. In this endeavor, Penn met with great success. Over eighty-five faculty members participated in working groups, sixteen students served on a Student Steering Committee, and more than fifty administrators provided information, supplied reports, or held discussions with one or more working group.

Seven working groups organized the involvement of faculty and students: Access and Equity, Assessment of Student Learning, Finance and Administration, Local Engagement, Global Engagement, Integrating Knowledge, and Undergraduate Research. The typical working group included eight to twelve faculty members, one student from the Student Steering Committee, one or two administrators, a staff director, and a staff assistant. Each working group was asked to assess a key priority or area of undergraduate education in relation to MSCHE standards and a preliminary set of research questions. Each group drafted a report, which formed the basis of the corresponding chapter of the final Self-Study Report.

The Steering Committee for the Self-Study was composed of the Chair of the Self-Study, the chairs of each of the working groups, the Vice President for Budget and Management Analysis, the Vice President for Institutional Affairs, and the Assistant Vice President for Institutional Research and Analysis. The committee was staffed by the Executive Director for Education and Academic Planning in the Office of the Provost, who also served as the Staff Director for the Self-Study. The Student Steering Committee consisted of representatives appointed by two branches of undergraduate student government, the Undergraduate Assembly and the Student Committee on Undergraduate Education. The Student Steering Committee organized and coordinated the work of the student representatives to the working groups. The Committee organized a series of events during the Self-Study process that provided an opportunity for undergraduates from around campus to participate in discussions with each working group.

In answering the key questions of the Self-Study, we began with a consideration of what is important to Penn. All research universities assess their programs with the purpose of excelling in their core work of teaching, research, and service. Penn's priorities are guided by a clearly articulated vision, expressed in the *Penn Compact: From Excellence to Eminence*. First presented by President Amy Gutmann in her 2004 inaugural address, the Penn Compact has three principles: increasing access, integrating knowledge, and engaging locally (nationally) and globally. Immediately following her election as Penn's eighth president in February 2004, Dr. Gutmann devoted four months to consultations with trustees, faculty, students and staff about Penn's great past and bright future. During the course of those conversations and briefings, she conceptualized the Penn Compact to reflect the University's historic strengths, build on the aims of Penn's strategic plan from 2002, the Agenda for Excellence, and express her aspirations for propelling Penn forward. The Compact was deeply resonant within the Penn community and was quickly and widely embraced as the strategic vision for setting departmental and institutional priorities. As the Compact approaches its tenth anniversary, again following conversations and consultation with faculty and staff, President Gutmann has announced the [Penn Compact 2020](#), which outlines evergreen and new priorities to advance its three core principles.

These principles of the Penn Compact, along with the MSCHE Standards of Excellence, informed the structure of this Self-Study Report. The first section assesses undergraduate education in relation to each of the Compact's three principles. The second section assesses three key areas of undergraduate education: undergraduate research, student learning, and finance and administration. The conclusion summarizes the report's key recommendations and suggests a path forward for assessing undergraduate education at Penn over the next decade.