



Overview of Key Findings, 2011-12

WhatWillTheyLearn.com covers all the major public and private universities in all 50 states—a total of 1007 four-year institutions that together enroll more than 7 million undergraduate students. Institutions are assigned a letter [grade](#) ranging from “A” to “F” based on how many of seven core subjects they require. Those subjects are English composition, mathematics, science, economics, American history or government, literature and intermediate-level foreign language.

FINDING #1: Colleges and universities have mostly abandoned a coherent content-rich general education curriculum, and allow students to graduate with major gaps in their academic skills and knowledge.

- More than 60% of all institutions receive a “C” or worse for requiring 3 or fewer subjects.
- One-third of the institutions (294 schools) receive “D” or “F” for requiring two or fewer subjects.

FINDING #2: Several crucial subjects are required at only a small fraction of American colleges and universities.

- Only 5% require economics.
- Slightly less than 20% require U.S. government or history.
- Barely 15% require intermediate-level foreign language.

FINDING #3: Paying a lot doesn’t get you a lot. Generally speaking, the higher the tuition, the more likely it is that students are left to devise their own general education.

- Average tuition & fees at the “A” schools is \$16,223. At the “F” schools, it’s \$27,529.

FINDING #4: America’s military academies are models of academic excellence, requiring a balanced and rigorous general education curriculum.

- Three military academies (Air Force, Coast Guard, and Army) receive “A” ratings for meeting six requirements.
- The Naval Academy receives a high “B” for requiring five subjects.
- In addition to rigorous requirements in mathematics and science, all of the academies require English composition and a survey course in literature.

FINDING #5: The nation’s historically black colleges and universities demonstrate overall stronger general education requirements than other public and private institutions.

- The average grade for an HBCU is a “B,” while the average grade for all other institutions in the 2011 What Will They Learn? study is a “C.”
- No single HBCU received an “F,” compared to the 87 “F’s” among the other schools in the 2011 What Will They Learn? study.
- Every HBCU in the study receives credit for an English composition requirement.

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