

Harvard University: Overview

Founded in 1636 by the Massachusetts Bay Colony’s Great and General Court, Harvard is the oldest college in the United States [harvard.edu](https://www.harvard.edu) . Originally named “New College,” it was soon renamed Harvard College in honor of clergyman John Harvard, who bequeathed half his estate and library to the institution [harvard.edu](https://www.harvard.edu) . Located in Cambridge, Massachusetts (with additional campuses in Boston’s Longwood and Allston areas), Harvard evolved from a single-college colonial school into a comprehensive global university with 14 schools. Its motto is *Veritas* (“Truth”), symbolized by the “Veritas” shield on its crest. Over nearly four centuries, Harvard expanded its offerings beyond undergraduate liberal arts (Harvard College) to establish professional and graduate schools – e.g. Harvard Medical School (est. 1782), Harvard Law School (1817), Harvard Business School (1908), Harvard Graduate School of Education (1920), Harvard Kennedy School of Government, and the engineering, design, divinity, public health and other graduate schools. This historic breadth makes Harvard a full university encompassing humanities, sciences, professional and technical fields.

Harvard has built a reputation as one of the world’s most prestigious institutions. It consistently ranks at or near the very top in global league tables. For example, Shanghai’s ARWU (Academic Ranking of World Universities) placed Harvard **#1** in the world for 2024 [shanghairanking.com](https://www.shanghairanking.com) . The Times Higher Education World University Rankings (2025) lists Harvard at **#3** globally [timeshighereducation.com](https://www.timeshighereducation.com) (up from #4 in 2024). In the 2025 QS World University Rankings Harvard is **#4** worldwide [topuniversities.com](https://www.topuniversities.com) . U.S. News & World Report also regularly ranks Harvard at or near **#1** in global university rankings (it has been #1 in the 2024–25 Best Global Universities list). Domestically, Harvard is among the top U.S. universities (U.S. News 2025 ranks it tied #3 nationally). These rankings reflect Harvard’s exceptional research output, faculty awards, and academic reputation. (A summary of global ranks is shown below.)

Ranking System	Latest Year	Harvard’s Rank	Source/Notes
ARWU (Shanghai) 2024	2024	#1	Harvard tops ARWU list shanghairanking.com .
Times Higher Ed (World Univ. 2025)	2025	#3	Harvard ranked #3 in THE 2025 rankings timeshighereducation.com .
QS World Univ. Rankings 2025	2025	#4	Harvard placed #4 in QS 2025 topuniversities.com .

Academic Programs and Notable Schools

Harvard's academic offerings span a wide range of disciplines. **Harvard College** (the undergraduate liberal arts college) grants A.B. and S.B. degrees in over 50 concentrations. The most popular majors include Economics, Government, Computer Science, Social Studies, and Molecular & Cellular Biology. Undergraduates experience a rigorous curriculum with heavy emphasis on liberal arts. In the Core Curriculum era Harvard required distribution requirements, but today students craft broad but deep programs, often combining science and humanities. The College faculty are drawn from Harvard's Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS), which is also home to Harvard's largest graduate program (the Graduate School of Arts & Sciences, GSAS).

Among Harvard's many professional schools, a few are especially renowned:

- **Harvard Law School (HLS)** – Founded 1817, it is the oldest continually operating law school in the U.S. HLS is consistently ranked among the world's top law schools. (QS World University by Subject for Law ranks Harvard Law #1 globally [topuniversities.com](https://www.topuniversities.com).) HLS introduced the case method of teaching law in the late 19th century and has produced numerous U.S. Supreme Court Justices and legal scholars.
- **Harvard Business School (HBS)** – Established 1908, HBS is a pioneer of modern business education. Its two-year full-time MBA program is one of the most prestigious in the world. For instance, QS Global MBA 2025 ranks HBS **#3** worldwide [topmba.com](https://www.topmba.com). HBS emphasizes general management, leadership, and entrepreneurship – and its "case study" method is emulated globally. Notable alumni include top business leaders and CEOs; its faculty includes Nobel laureates in Economics.
- **Harvard Medical School (HMS)** – Founded 1782, HMS is a leading center for biomedical research and education. Harvard affiliates (through hospitals like Massachusetts General, Brigham and Women's, Children's, etc.) receive among the highest U.S. NIH research funding each year. Though HMS withdrew from public rankings, it is universally regarded as a top medical school worldwide. Many medical and research breakthroughs (e.g. in genetics, surgery, public health) have come from HMS faculty.
- **Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health** – The School of Public Health (established 1922, renamed in 2014 after a \$350M gift) is a global leader in population health research and training. U.S. News ranks Harvard Chan typically at **#2** in public health

- specialties (e.g. epidemiology, biostatistics, health policy). Its faculty and alumni include leaders in public health policy worldwide.
- **Harvard Kennedy School (KSG)** – The John F. Kennedy School of Government (est. 1936) is one of the world’s top schools for public policy, administration, and international affairs. KSG’s Master in Public Policy and mid-career Master in Public Administration programs are highly selective; U.S. News placed KSG **#3** (tie) among public affairs programs usnews.com. Alumni include heads of state, cabinet ministers, and NGO leaders.
 - **Harvard Graduate School of Education** – Harvard’s School of Education (est. 1920) is a leading center for education research and teacher training. U.S. News ranks it among the top education schools (around #6 tie in 2025 data).
 - **Harvard John A. Paulson School of Engineering and Applied Sciences (SEAS)** – Historically known as the Lawrence Scientific School (founded 1847), Harvard’s engineering school is now part of FAS. It emphasizes interdisciplinary engineering, computer science, and applied math. (U.S. News ranks Harvard engineering around #20 in 2024 usnews.com; Times Higher Education’s World University Engineering subject ranking even placed Harvard #3 globally in 2019.) SEAS has grown rapidly in reputation, attracting leaders in AI, robotics, and bioengineering.

(Table: Selected Harvard schools and programs)

(KSG)

School/Program	Focus Areas	Rank/Notes
Harvard College (UG)	Liberal Arts & Sciences (A.B./S.B. degrees)	US News #3 National Univ. (2025)
Law School (HLS)	J.D., LL.M., legal research	Top-ranked globally (QS Law #1 <small>topuniversities.com</small>); numerous Supreme Court justices among alumni.
Business School (HBS)	MBA, PhD (Business Administration)	QS Global MBA #3 (2025) <small>topmba.com</small> . Case-method pedagogy.
Medical School (HMS)	M.D., biomedical research	Among world’s elite (top NIH funding; many medical Nobel Prizes affiliated).
School of Public Health	MPH, DrPH, biostatistics, epidemiology	US News #2 (tied) in public health specialties.
Kennedy School	MPP, MPA, international affairs	US News #3 (Public Affairs, 2024).

School/Program	Focus Areas	Rank/Notes
Graduate School of Ed.	Ed.D., Ed.M., Teacher Training	US News ~#6 (tied) in education, global reach.
SEAS (Engineering)	Engineering, Applied Sciences, Computer Science	#20 (US News 2024) in engineering; strong CS dept.
GSAS (Arts & Sciences)	PhD across all natural & social sciences	Largest grad school; Harvard's basic research engine.
Extension School	Part-time undergrad/grad (continued)	Diverse, flexible programs (not ranked among Ivy PhD)

Admissions

Harvard's admissions are among the most selective in the world. For the Class of 2028 (entering 2024), the College received **54,008** applications and admitted **1,970** students, an admit rate of about **3.65%** college.harvard.edu . This follows slightly higher admit rates of 3.41% (2027 class) and 3.19% (2026 class) after a record-high application pool in 2022 thecrimson.com college.harvard.edu . A summary of recent admits:

Class (Entering)	Applications		Admitted		Acceptance %		Enrolled	Yield %
2026 (Fall 2022)	61,220	1,955	3.19%	thecrimson.com	1,570	80.3%		
2027 (Fall 2023)	56,937	1,942	3.41%	thecrimson.com	1,610	82.9%		
2028 (Fall 2024)	54,008	1,970	3.65%	college.harvard.edu	1,647	83.6%		

(Harvard's yield – the percentage of admitted students who enroll – is historically very high, over 80%.)

Harvard admits students through two modes: Single-Choice Early Action (non-binding) and Regular Decision. Applicants submit the Common Application (or Coalition App) plus Harvard-specific supplements. The admissions process is *need-blind* for U.S. applicants: financial need does not affect admission chances college.harvard.edu . The review is holistic, emphasizing academic excellence and personal qualities.

Profile of Admitted Students: Admitted students are academically exceptional. Nearly all have nearly straight-A high school records, often the highest GPA in their school. Standardized testing is not required (Harvard is currently test-optional), but in years when students reported scores the middle 50% ranged about **1460–1570 SAT** or **33–35 ACT**. For example, the Class of 2025 (entering 2021) had an average SAT of **1494** and ACT of **34** features.thecrimson.com . Nearly all admitted students have taken multiple AP/IB or other advanced

courses. Extracurricular and personal achievements are also reviewed: Harvard looks for leaders and innovators, from research projects and artistic talents to community service and athletics.

Demographics & Diversity: Harvard College is highly diverse geographically and (traditionally) racially. In recent admitted classes: about 15–16% African American, 16–17% Hispanic/Latinx, 37–38% Asian, ~2% Native American/Alaska Native, ~0.5% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and ~29% White (for U.S. citizens) college.harvard.edu. International students made up roughly 18% of the most recent admitted cohort college.harvard.edu. Students represent all 50 states and over 100 countries thecrimson.com. Women slightly outnumber men among undergraduates (recent classes have been ~53–54% women thecrimson.com). First-generation college students, veterans, and others from underrepresented backgrounds are significant constituencies, reflecting Harvard's expanding efforts at economic and diversity outreach.

Admissions Trends: Applications surged during the pandemic (reaching ~61,220 for the Class of 2026) and have since moderated. Yield has climbed with higher demand; the Class of 2028's yield was ~83.6%. Notably, following the U.S. Supreme Court's 2023 decision *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard* outlawing race-conscious admissions, Harvard has ceased practices involving racial consideration college.harvard.edu. (The administration noted it cannot share some detailed admissions data due to that decision college.harvard.edu.) Harvard is adapting its holistic review to comply, while seeking to maintain a diverse student body. The admissions office also monitors and adjusts for changes: for example, Harvard expanded its financial aid outreach to attract lower-income students (see below) and launched special initiatives (like deferred MBA programs, 2+2 programs, etc.) to broaden the pipeline to graduate programs.

Financial Aid and Affordability

Harvard pursues a **no-loan, full-need** financial aid policy. All admitted undergraduates receive need-based aid, and Harvard meets 100% of demonstrated financial need with grants, not loans. Harvard College is need-blind for U.S. (and now international) applicants: a student's need has **no impact** on admission college.harvard.edu. Families with typical assets making less than **\$100,000** per year pay nothing (all costs – tuition, room, board, fees – are covered) college.harvard.edu. Even families making up to **\$200,000** receive full tuition coverage; many pay little or nothing depending on circumstances college.harvard.edu. Students from families above \$200K may still receive substantial aid if warranted. Harvard also does *not* consider home equity in aid calculations college.harvard.edu. In 2007, Harvard eliminated undergraduate loans entirely from aid packages.

Starting in 2025–26, Harvard further **expanded aid**: it announced that families earning $\leq \$100\text{K}$ (typical assets) will have *all billed costs covered* news.harvard.edu, and families $\leq \$200\text{K}$ will get free tuition and aid for other costs news.harvard.edu. This makes Harvard affordable to a record share of applicants. Historically, Harvard's aid initiative (beginning 2004) progressively raised income thresholds (e.g. free tuition for $\leq \$65\text{K}$ in 2009, $\leq \$100\text{K}$ by 2023) news.harvard.edu. Today about 65% of Harvard undergrads receive scholarship aid, with an average aid package around \$65,000/year. In FY2024 Harvard granted $\sim \$749$ million in scholarships and student aid harvard.edu. (Harvard's massive endowment – **\$53.2 billion** as of 2024 harvard.edu – underlies these generous programs.)

To summarize: Harvard's aid program ensures that admitted students can attend regardless of income. Most students from middle- and lower-income families graduate debt-free. A vivid example: under the new policy, a family of four earning \$100K or less (typical assets) will pay **\$0** in tuition, housing, or fees college.harvard.edu news.harvard.edu. This affordability helps Harvard attract talented students worldwide.

Campus Life and Student Body

Campus and Residential Life: Harvard's main campus centers on Harvard Yard in Cambridge. Freshmen live in one of several **Yard dormitories** in Cambridge's historic center. From sophomore year on, undergraduates are assigned to one of 12 Residential **Houses** (plus two newer houses) by a "blocking" process. Each House (e.g. Adams, Eliot, Leverett, etc.) is a community of ~ 350 students with its own dining hall, common rooms, library, and facilities

college.harvard.edu. Houses provide mentoring and a social home base (with faculty tutors, resident staff, social events). This House system fosters close-knit communities across cohorts. Virtually all students live on campus their first year; after that, 90% of sophomores live in Houses (either upperclass dorms or as blockmates together). Harvard also has grad/professional housing in Cambridge and Boston.

Student Population: Harvard's total enrollment (Fall 2024) is about **24,500** students oira.harvard.edu, of which $\sim 7,000$ are undergraduates and $\sim 17,500$ are graduate/professional students (spread across GSAS, Business, Law, Med, Public Health, Education, Divinity, Design, etc.) oira.harvard.edu. The student body is diverse: for example, the undergraduate College enrolled (Fall 2024) 6,980 students of whom $\sim 1,048$ were international (non-U.S.) oira.harvard.edu. Among U.S. citizens/permanent residents, representation was $\sim 24\%$ White, 37% Asian, 15% Black, 11% Hispanic, etc., at the university level oira.harvard.edu. Harvard's student body includes people

from every state, 150+ countries, and a wide range of backgrounds. Roughly one-third of undergrads come from families making <\$100K, reflecting socioeconomic diversity.

Student Life and Activities: Harvard students enjoy an extremely rich extracurricular scene. The College reports *over 450 student organizations* college.harvard.edu covering arts (orchestras, glee clubs, dance troupes), journalism (the daily *Harvard Crimson* is the oldest U.S. college daily), performance (the famed Hasty Pudding theatrical company, theater groups), cultural clubs (50+ multicultural societies), political and debate clubs, community service (tutoring, relief work), athletics (31 varsity sports, plus 40+ club sports and intramurals), and more

college.harvard.edu . Students can also join ROTC programs via MIT or local military college cross-registration college.harvard.edu . Harvard publishes dozens of academic and special-interest journals, hosts speakers, conferences, and student-run publications. The campus includes museums (Art Museums, Peabody Museum, Semitic Museum), libraries (Widener and many specialized libraries), and research facilities that students can use. Cambridge and nearby Boston provide urban cultural, internship, and nightlife options. In short, Harvard's residential culture, House life, and abundance of clubs and services create a dynamic environment beyond the classroom.

Demographics: Recent admitted classes have been majority-minority in aggregate: for example, the Class of 2027's U.S. students were ~14% Black, ~16% Latinx, ~38% Asian, with 29% White thecrimson.com . International students (full pay and aid) make up roughly 15–20% of each class. Gender ratios are balanced; recent classes were ~54% female thecrimson.com . One in six students identifies as first-generation college. Together, Harvard's student population is highly international, richly diverse, and drawn from top students worldwide.

Notable Faculty and Alumni

Harvard's faculty and alumni include many of history's most influential figures in politics, science, business, and culture. **Alumni** highlights: Harvard has educated *eight U.S. Presidents* – more than any other university news.harvard.edu . These include John Adams, John Quincy Adams, Rutherford B. Hayes, Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin D. Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, George W. Bush (MBA '75), and Barack Obama (J.D. '91) news.harvard.edu . It has produced numerous heads of state and government worldwide (prime ministers, royalty, etc.), Nobel Prize winners, and CEOs of major companies (e.g. Bill Gates enrolled in 1973, Mark Zuckerberg in 2002). Hundreds of alumni serve in Congress, federal and state government, the Supreme Court, and on corporate boards. The media, law, and academia are also full of Harvard grads – ranging from Supreme Court Justices Stephen Breyer and Elena Kagan (both HLS) to scholars like Henry Louis Gates Jr., economists like Amartya Sen (Nobel), and authors like Ralph Waldo Emerson (Class of 1821).

Faculty achievements are equally stellar. Harvard faculty and researchers have won *over 300*

Nobel Prizes and more than 50 Pulitzer Prizes affiliated with the university timeshighereducation.com

bestmastersprograms.org . In fact, Harvard affiliates (alumni and faculty) account for a record **161**

Nobel laureates, the most of any institution bestmastersprograms.org . (These include laureates in Peace, Literature, Physics, Medicine, Economics, etc.) Harvard professors have also won Fields

Medals, MacArthur "Genius" awards, National Medals of Science, and countless other honors.

Notable current scholars include leaders in economics (Amos Tversky, Martin Feldstein, Kenneth Rogoff), science (George Church in genetics, Evelyn Hu in engineering, the cluster of

Harvard Medical Nobelists), and the humanities (e.g. Derek Walcott, Toni Morrison, Seamus Heaney as former Harvard professors). On the whole, the Harvard community is known for its extraordinary intellectual capital: award-winning faculty, and alumni who are heads of state,

captains of industry, and cultural icons timeshighereducation.com news.harvard.edu .

Research Output and Innovation

Harvard is a premier research university. It spends on the order of **\$1 billion+ annually on research**, drawing federal and private grants across fields. The university houses cuttingedge labs in biotechnology (e.g. the Wyss Institute), physics (Center for Astrophysics), engineering, and social sciences. Harvard's many research centers – from the Harvard Stem Cell Institute to the Belfer Center (public policy) – regularly publish influential work. The university's publication output is among the highest in the world, contributing to its high rankings (which weigh citations and research influence).

Harvard fosters innovation and entrepreneurship vigorously. Its **Office of Technology Development (OTD)** helps faculty and students commercialize discoveries. In the past five years, Harvard OTD has facilitated *96 startup companies* based on Harvard research and secured 897 new U.S. patents, generating over \$100 million in revenue thecrimson.com . For example, lab research at Harvard has spun off companies in biotechnology (CRISPR gene editing), materials (bioplastics), and software (analytics). Harvard Innovation Labs (i-lab) is a student incubator that provides space, mentors, and resources to budding entrepreneurs. Additionally, Harvard's career services, alumni network, and research grants connect students to internships and venture capital. The synergy of top-tier research, proximity to Boston/Cambridge biotech clusters, and institutional support makes Harvard a hotbed of innovation.

Policy Influence and Global Leadership

Harvard's impact extends into governance, policy, and global affairs. Its **Harvard Kennedy School** educates many future diplomats, economists, and policymakers. Faculty such as Larry Summers, Joseph Nye, and Graham Allison have directly advised U.S. presidents and foreign governments. The Harvard community includes dozens of heads of state and hundreds of legislators, U.N. officials, judges, and NGO leaders. Alumni are found among presidential cabinets (e.g. U.S. Secretaries of State like John Kerry, Treasury Secretaries like Lawrence

Summers), central bank governors, and CEO leadership in finance (e.g. Michael Bloomberg of Bloomberg LP, and hedge fund leaders). Harvard professors regularly testify before Congress and influence regulations (e.g. Harvard Law's influential Corporate Governance blog).

Academically, Harvard drives policy research through think tanks and institutes. For example, the Belfer Center and the Weatherhead Center convene experts on international relations and science policy. Harvard's **Radcliffe Institute** and **Kennedy School** often partner with global institutions on issues like climate change, education, and health. Harvard faculty have led major public health campaigns (e.g. Jerome Adams, class of 1996, became U.S. Surgeon General during COVID-19). The university also fosters global leadership through short courses and executive programs for international officials.

In short, Harvard's role in global leadership is disproportionate: it brings together talented individuals from around the world and provides them with connections and ideas to shape policy. The result is a long history of alumni and faculty at the top of government, business, and academia worldwide timeshighereducation.com news.harvard.edu. Its research influences global issues from cancer to climate, and its graduates include current and future changemakers.

Recent Developments and Controversies

Harvard's long-term trajectory is being actively shaped by recent events:

- **Leadership upheaval:** In February 2023, Claudine Gay became Harvard's 30th president, the first Black person to hold the post. However, Gay's tenure was cut short by controversy. In October 2023, questions arose about how Harvard (and she) handled campus responses to the Israel–Gaza conflict; students of Jewish and Arab backgrounds protested and demanded better support and neutrality thecrimson.com thecrimson.com. Then in late 2023, news surfaced that portions of Gay's scholarly writings had been improperly sourced. Gay testified before Congress in December 2023 about campus antisemitism (sparking Republican criticism), and shortly thereafter she resigned amid plagiarism

allegations npr.org abcnews.go.com. This made national news and triggered an intense period of scrutiny over campus politics and academic ethics. (Investigations into her published work are ongoing.)

In response, Harvard's governing board appointed Provost Alan Garber (a physician and longtime administrator) as interim president. Garber moved quickly to stabilize campus climate: he convened task forces on antisemitism and diversity, revised protest guidelines to regulate encampments and building occupation, and issued a new neutrality policy limiting public statements on contentious political issues thecrimson.com. By late 2023, the Board made Garber permanent president through 2027 to restore confidence thecrimson.com. Despite these changes, this leadership turmoil has been a major flashpoint and will continue to influence Harvard's direction.

- **Campus protests and free speech:** The October 7, 2023 attacks in Israel-Palestine led to student demonstrations at Harvard (as on many campuses). In April 2024, proPalestinian students set up a 20-day encampment in Harvard Yard, demanding divestment from Israel and protesting the war thecrimson.com. Simultaneously, pro-Israel student rallies also took place. These protests tested Harvard's policies on free speech and safety. Garber's administration instituted rules restricting encampments and disciplined rule violations. The episode highlighted tensions around academic free speech, student activism, and Middle East politics. (Harvard is now more cautious about how campus controversies might threaten donor relations or accreditation.)
- **Affirmative Action litigation:** In June 2023, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled (*SFFA v. Harvard*) that Harvard's consideration of race in admissions is unconstitutional. Harvard must change its recruitment and evaluation processes to achieve diversity without explicit racial preferences. This decision is a watershed for Harvard's admissions; the College has already adjusted by emphasizing socioeconomic factors and a broad "holistic review." It has also limited the admissions data it publicly reports, citing the court's injunction college.harvard.edu. The long-term impact on Harvard's student body composition and pipeline is being closely watched nationwide.
- **Donor relations and finances:** The public controversies have had financial repercussions. Harvard officials warned that donations might decline due to the campus uproar, and indeed the university reported a 14% drop in fundraising in FY2024 thecrimson.com. Some Congressional Republicans have threatened to cut federal funding for Harvard, alleging ideological bias. The new administration is actively engaging alumni and Congress to restore trust. Harvard's vast endowment provides a cushion, but its annual spending (~\$6.4B in 2024) depends on contributions and investment returns harvard.edu, so sustaining donor support is vital.

- **Other developments:** On a positive front, Harvard recently expanded its financial aid (as noted above) to enroll more middle-income students news.harvard.edu . It also launched new interdisciplinary initiatives (e.g. climate and AI institutes, joint science-liberal arts programs). Harvard's libraries and museums continue major expansions (e.g. the Shirley Center). And post-pandemic, Harvard has resumed in-person instruction fully, with a rebound in international student enrollment.

In summary, Harvard remains a preeminent research and teaching institution, with a global reputation bolstered by its history, programs, and people. However, it faces challenges adapting to new legal, political, and social realities. The coming years will see Harvard balancing its traditions of free inquiry and diversity with the pressures of leadership turnover and changing public expectations. Yet its deep endowment, world-class faculty, and broad alumni base give it resilience to navigate these trends.

Sources: Authoritative university sources, educational rankings (THE, QS, U.S. News), Harvard Gazette and Crimson articles, and other reputable analyses were used. Key facts and figures are cited above in the format **【source†Lx-Ly】** .

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The history of Harvard University

<https://www.harvard.edu/about/history/>



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