

America's Hot Colleges

Yes, Harvard's on the list. But so are lesser-known schools. Here are our picks for the places creating buzz for 2005-06.

BY JAY MATHEWS

FOR STUDENTS LOOKING to attend an American university, a few names have always loomed large: the eight Ivies, a few small institutions like Amherst and some celebrated state schools like the University of California, Berkeley. But increasingly, today's students are widening their searches and discovering many schools that are just as good—and often just about as difficult to get into—as the famous ones. And it's sort of cool to find out that a hot college doesn't need to be one that Grandma and Grandpa have heard of.

With competition for spots in U.S. universities fiercer than ever, families are looking for lesser-known schools that make the grade, along with those icons that live up to their reputations. All the colleges on the Hot List for 2005-06 have one attribute in common: they're creating buzz among students, school officials and longtime observers of the admissions process. And each entry reflects a place that is preparing students well for a complex world. Herewith, eight of our picks for America's Hottest Colleges:

HOTTEST FOR REJECTING YOU Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts

Last year Yale edged out Harvard as the most selective Ivy. But after Harvard announced that families earning less than \$40,000 wouldn't have to pay the usual parental contribution to tuition, applications jumped to a record 22,796, and the acceptance rate this spring dropped to a new low for the Ivies, only 9.1 percent. The aid initiative increased the number of low-income students—296 qualified. Bottom line: competition was tougher than ever. Harvard undergrads often mock themselves. "It's nice to know you're going to school with people who will control the world," says senior Simon Vozick-Levinson. But they also know how to take advantage. The student paper, the *Crimson*, is putting out a new book, "How They Got Into Harvard," which profiles successful applicants, along with a second book full of winning application essays.

HOTTEST FOR SCIENCE University of California, San Diego, La Jolla

Science can be fun. UCSD undergraduates mark the end of the school year with the Watermelon Drop, a 40-year-old tradition that began when physics students tested velocity by dropping a melon from seven stories up. On a campus where a quarter of the \$1.8 billion in revenue is federal research funds, and where there are eight Nobel laureates on the faculty, the science is also quite serious. UCSD chancellor

Marye Anne Fox, an organic chemist, says welcoming undergrads into labs is a priority. The school, she says, is raising the quality of undergraduate education by offering new science majors like molecular synthesis and bioinformatics.

Its coastal location, too, is a plus. "Where else can you collect samples from the beach, the desert and the mountains all in one day—and still have time to run genetic tests on them that night?" says Meg Eckles, a biology doctoral

student. Faculty and alumni have spun off nearly 200 companies, including about a third of the region's biotech firms.

HOTTEST FOR LIBERAL ARTS Macalester College, St. Paul, Minnesota

The 1,900-student campus in a vibrant metropolis has become a key recipient of the growing number of Harvard, Yale and Princeton applicants who are rejected for no other reason than that those schools don't have space

