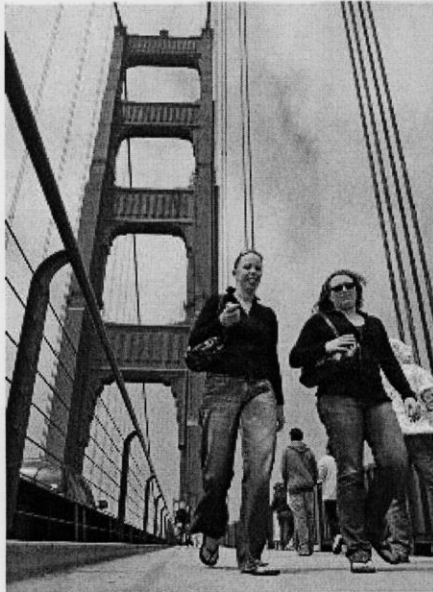




# Best college towns (and cities) ranked

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By Betty Klinck, USA TODAY



By Justin Sullivan, Getty Images

Pedestrians walk across the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. The "city by the bay" was ranked No. 1 in major metro areas as a college destination.

Shopping for colleges? Location may be more important than you think, according to a new index of 75 "best cities" for college students.

"The education and experiences you get extend beyond the walls of the campus," says Kerry Lynch, senior fellow at the non-profit American Institute for Economic Research, whose 2010-2011 College Destination Index is out Wednesday.

"Most students and their parents think about location in a vague way. They have a general impression of locales, but they don't have much

solid information, and it's hard to compare one to another. And that's what we're trying to do — so they can get a picture of that," Lynch says.

The organization identified 222 metropolitan statistical areas with at least 15,000 students, based on U.S. Census Bureau standards, and then chose the top 75. It then ranked cities in four population categories, from the largest metro areas to small college towns. The rankings are based on 12 criteria in three general categories: academic environment (with an eye toward factors such as student diversity and degree attainment), quality of life (arts and leisure, cost of living, etc.) and professional opportunity (such measures as earning potential, unemployment rate, entrepreneurial activity).

The index is "based on objective data that we get from the U.S. Census Bureau or the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics or the National Science Foundation, so it's not colored by the schools providing data or by surveys of students and professors," says Lynch.

The index is free on the organization's website (aier.org); it also is publishing a companion guide, 2010-2011 College Destinations (\$10), which profiles the top 40 cities in the index — 10 in each of the four population categories.

## Top 10 major metros areas

(Populations over 2.5 million)

- 1. San Francisco

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2. New York
3. Washington
4. Boston
5. Seattle
6. Baltimore
7. Los Angeles
8. San Diego
9. Minneapolis-St. Paul
10. Philadelphia

**Top 10 midsize metros**

*(Population 1 million to 2.5 million)*

1. San Jose
2. Austin
3. Raleigh, N.C.
4. Hartford, Conn.
5. Portland, Ore.
6. Pittsburgh
7. Salt Lake City
8. Rochester, N.Y.
9. Buffalo
10. Nashville

**Top 10 small cities**

*(250,000 to 1 million)*

1. Boulder, Colo.

2. Ann Arbor, Mich.
3. Bridgeport, Conn.
4. Trenton-Ewing, N.J.
5. Gainesville, Fla.
6. Madison, Wis.
7. Durham, N.C.
8. Santa Cruz, Calif.
9. Honolulu
10. Fort Collins, Colo.

**Top 10 college towns**

*(under 250,000)*

1. Ithaca, N.Y.
2. State College, Pa.
3. Iowa City
4. Ames, Iowa
5. Champaign-Urbana, Ill.

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6. Charlottesville, Va.

7. Corvallis, Ore.

8. Bloomington, Ind.

9. Lawrence, Kan.

10. Logan, Utah

Source: American Institute for Economic Research

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