

# The happiest schools in the U.S., UK and Australia

University can be a life-changing experience, from learning the skills needed to secure your dream job to making life-long friends. But at which universities will you make the most joyful memories? Resume.io used an emotional recognition tool to analyze thousands of Instagram photos geotagged at different universities to find out which universities are the happiest.

From the friends made and knowledge gained to all those late nights spent playing beer pong, if you went to college, chances are you made some happy memories during your time as a student. You may have even met the love of your life at university, as [one in seven married people in America](#) does.

But if you're yet to take the leap into higher education, you'll no doubt be wondering which university could offer you the happiest experience. Surveys, reviews and rankings can all help you to form an idea of how you'll find the academic side of college, but where can a prospective student go to check out the light-hearted, candid moments of campus life?

With [59% of those aged 18 to 29](#) on **Instagram**, we figured the beloved photo app offered a unique glimpse into just how happy university students are. So, in a mammoth study that's surely worth an A+, our analysts at [Resume.io](#) used Instagram and an innovative AI tool to discover the happiest universities in the U.S., UK, and Australia.

## What We Did

Using [Amazon Rekognition API](#), an AI emotion recognition tool that measures levels of emotion in human faces, Resume.io analysts scanned thousands of Instagram photos geotagged at different universities to find out which universities boast the highest proportion of faces that register as happy. Our

analysis considers a face to be happy if the AI tool gave it a happiness score equal to or greater than 75%.

## Key Findings

- **Texas Christian University** is the **happiest university in the U.S.:** **three in four (76.47%) faces** tagged there on Instagram are happy, according to AI analysis.
- **King's College London** ranks as the **happiest university in the UK** — **71%** of faces tagged there are happy.
- **63.55%** of faces tagged in Instagram photos at the **University of the Sunshine Coast** are happy — making it the **happiest university in Australia.**

## How We Used AI to Detect Happiness

While [smiles can range](#) from politely professional to the awkward kind reserved for open mic comedy nights, big grins caught on camera are usually a reliable indicator of a happy mood. But artificial intelligence increasingly knows best, so, equipped with an [Instagram account](#) and an AI tool that can detect emotional levels in faces, we went in search of the happiest universities in the U.S., UK and Australia.

The Happiest Colleges Explainer

[Click here to see the image in full size](#)

Using the AI tool, we scanned thousands of images of faces featured in Instagram photos tagged at different universities. The tool analyzes clear photos of faces and provides a confidence level from 0% to 100% on how likely a face is to be expressing happiness. For the purposes of our analysis, we considered faces that received a score equal to or greater than 75% to be happy, enabling us to calculate the proportion of faces tagged at each university on Instagram that registered as happy. Read on for our results...

# Texas Christian University Is the Happiest University in the U.S.

When it comes to higher education, America has it covered — after India, the U.S. counts the [most universities in the world](#). Spoilt for choice, prospective students can weigh up all sorts of factors before deciding on an alma mater, like location, reputation and tuition fees... but which university is the happiest of them all?

Our analysis reveals that the overall winner is **Texas Christian University**: when we applied a facial expression analysis to Instagram photos tagged at the Fort Worth institution, we found that **three out of four (76.47%) faces** registered as happy — more than any other university in the country.

The Happiest Colleges in the US

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Based on student surveys, the [Princeton Review](#) places TCU fifth in a ranking of the universities with the happiest students (its first choice, [Tulane University](#), also appears in our top 20 list) and third for student quality of life. Having the 13th most beautiful campus in the country might also have something to do with it, as according to one study, people are happier when they [spend time in scenic locations](#).

We also discovered that only one of the top 20 happiest universities belongs to the prestigious Ivy League (University of Pennsylvania), echoing a [2014 poll by Gallup](#) that found that going to a top university is no guarantee of future happiness.

## King's College London Tops Our Ranking of the Happiest UK Universities

Our cousins across the pond may boast some of the oldest universities in the

world, but which university in the UK is the happiest? According to our analysis, **King's College London** takes the crown: **71%** of faces appearing in Instagram photos tagged at this prestigious university registered as happy.

In 2023, the Times Higher Education University Rankings judged KCL to be the [sixth-best university in the country](#) and the [ninth-best in Europe](#). If that's not enough reason to be happy, students are likely thrilled that King's is London's most central university, with four out of five campuses situated on the picturesque River Thames.

The Happiest Colleges in the UK

[Click here to see the image in full size](#)

In second place comes Harper Adams University, where 68.35% of faces featuring in Instagram photos register as happy. Though this institution is fairly small, it received the [fifth-highest "overall satisfaction" rating](#) in the UK in a national survey of students in 2022. Previous research has linked attending a small university with [better student satisfaction](#).

## **University of the Sunshine Coast Is the Happiest Australian University**

Our research reveals that the **University of the Sunshine Coast** is the happiest university in Australia. This country already ranks as one of the [happiest countries in the world](#), according to the World Happiness Report in 2022. **63.55%** of faces appearing in Instagram photos tagged at this Queensland institution registered as happy when we applied an emotional recognition analysis, which is the highest proportion of any university down under.

The Happiest Colleges in Australia

[Click here to see the image in full size](#)

This small university packs a big punch in the world of academia, consistently receiving [five star-ratings](#) for teaching quality, overall student experience and learning resources. Being so close to the Sunshine Coast's scenic beaches may have something to do with the institution's high happiness rate, too — according to a study by the University of Exeter, living by the coast can [improve mental health](#).

The second-happiest institution is the University of Queensland (54.84%), the [third-best university in the country](#), according to the Times Higher Education University Rankings.

## How Happy Is Your Alma Mater?

If you are or were a student in the U.S., UK or Australia, you might be wondering where your alma mater ended up in our ranking of the happiest universities. Check out our interactive table below for a full breakdown of our results for the 233 institutions included in our analysis.

## Not Everyone Feels Happy at University

If countless Hollywood movies are to be believed, the university experience is a happy whirlwind of non-stop parties and socializing with new friends. But, of course, while some people look back on their college years as the best of their lives, many others have different experiences of the journey from freshman to full-fledged graduate; in fact, low mood is actually very common on campus, with one survey revealing that [41% of students](#) in the U.S. have symptoms of depression.

From an overwhelming workload to homesickness, all sorts of factors can contribute to someone not having a blast at university. But, as [Sarah Richardson](#) (head of student services at the UK's University of Derby) puts it, "good mental health is vital for students. In short, happy and healthy students are successful students." Fortunately, even students at the world's happiest universities should be able to find plenty of support and guidance if they're

struggling with their mental health.

For ten tips on how to look after your mental health at university, take a look at this helpful [guide offered by the University of Michigan](#).

## Methodology & Sources

We began by manually curating a list of Instagram location pages for the top universities in the U.S., UK, and Australia (e.g., [the location page for Princeton University](#)). From these pages we collected the latest available and featured images.

We cleaned the resulting images to avoid duplicates, then analyzed the remaining images with [Amazon Rekognition API](#). Amazon Rekognition API is a facial emotion recognition tool that scans faces and calculates various metrics regarding facial expressions.

We focused on the 'happiness' metric, i.e., how likely a face is to be expressing happiness. For the purposes of our study, we considered a face to be happy if its happiness score was given as equal to or greater than 75%.

To avoid background faces altering the results in photos with a large crowd, we set the threshold to an analysis of no more than five faces per photo.

We could then rank universities in each country by the proportion of happy faces appearing in Instagram photos tagged there. We only report results for universities where our analysis found more than 100 faces.

The data was collected in December 2022 and January 2023.