



Community College: FAQs

Frequently Asked Questions about Community Colleges – and Answers

What is a community college?

Community college is the most common type of two-year college, also called career, technical and vocational colleges. These colleges offer many types of educational programs, including those that lead to associate degrees and certificates. Certificates and some types of associate degrees focus on career readiness. Other types of associate degrees are good preparation for study at a four-year college, where graduates can transfer to continue their education and earn a bachelor's degree.

Who goes to community college?

Around 40 percent of US undergraduate students attend community colleges. 18 to 24 year old students make up the largest age group. Community colleges also attract working adults, retirees and others who want to learn.

Why should I consider going to one?

At a community college, you can:

- **Save money.** Tuition and fee costs are usually much lower than those at four-year colleges. On average, students at two-year colleges pay around \$3,500 a year for tuition and fees.
- **Prepare for transfer to a four-year college.** Many community college graduates decide to transfer and complete their bachelor's degrees. Advance planning can help ensure that the credits you earn will count toward your degree at the four-year college you hope to attend. Talk to your academic advisor to get more information about transferring.
- **Get ready for a career.** If you want to enter the workforce sooner, you can earn a certificate or degree in a career-oriented field, such as culinary arts, firefighting or engineering technology.
- **Try out college.** Most programs are open admission. This means that you can go to college even if your high school grades weren't strong. A community college is also a good option if you're not sure you're ready for college. You'll have a chance to challenge yourself and see if college is right for you, while having access to smaller classrooms and strong supports, such as tutoring and programs that support underserved and first generation to college students.
- **Take advantage of a flexible schedule.** Most community colleges allow you to attend full-time or part-time, and you can schedule your courses around home and work commitments. There's a campus within a short driving distance or public transportation commute of many towns in the US.

How can a community college help me decide what to do with my life?

You can explore different subjects before committing to a program, without having to be too concerned about tuition costs. If you take a wide range of courses — including those in the liberal arts and those that are career-oriented — you can discover many different options in one place. Many community colleges offer intensive counseling that can help you assess your abilities, interests and education options.

Can I get financial aid?

Even though tuition at community colleges is usually low, financial aid is available. The Federal Pell Grant, for example, is open to students attending any accredited postsecondary institution. You can even qualify if you go part-time.

Why do I have to work hard in high school if open admission is common?

In order to succeed in college, you need a solid foundation in reading, writing and math skills. Unless you build them in high school, you may have to take remedial, or catch-up, courses when you arrive at a community college. These are also called developmental or basic skills courses. These remedial courses won't count toward your degree, so graduating will take you longer and cost you more if you're not prepared.

You will probably be required to take placement tests when you start college. The results will show whether you need to take any remedial courses before beginning college-level study.

Is there an on-campus community?

Unlike residential colleges, many community colleges lack on-campus housing, so most students live nearby. Therefore, many of these colleges make a special effort to build a sense of community on campus. You'll find a wide variety of activities, similar to those at four-year colleges.

Has anyone famous gone to community college?

Plenty of high achievers started out at community college. Here's a short list of successful alumni:

- Gwendolyn Brooks, Pulitzer Prize-winning poet
- Eileen Collins, former National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) astronaut
- Carol Guzy, four-time Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer
- Tom Hanks, actor and winner of two "Best Actor" Academy Awards
- Joyce Luther Kennard, California Supreme Court justice
- Jeanne Kirkpatrick, former United Nations ambassador
- Jim Lehrer, author and former news anchor for PBS
- Robert Moses, choreographer and dance company founder
- Nolan Ryan, retired Major League Baseball professional athlete
- Sam Shepard, Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright
- James Sinegal, cofounder and chief executive officer of Costco
- Amy Tan, celebrated author of numerous works of fiction and non-fiction
- Maxwell Taylor, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

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