

Frequently Asked Questions – Community Colleges

What is a community college?

A: Community colleges are publicly supported and locally oriented colleges that offer programs for transfer to a four-year college, career education programs, remedial or "catch-up" programs for students who lack a strong educational background, and continuing education for cultural growth, life enrichment, and skills improvement.

Q: Is a community college right for me?

A: A community college is one educational option among many. Some students apply to the University of California or the California State University. California Community Colleges, though, have a big advantage for many other students as they provide a greater variety of programs.

A community college is a good choice for any student who may want to attend a four-year school later but who is not yet academically, personally, or economically ready to begin study at a university. In a community college, students can choose to work toward an associate (two-year) degree in hundreds of academic and technical fields that will enable them to transfer to a college or university to complete a baccalaureate degree; or, they can complete a one- or two-year training or certificate program in a choice of occupational fields, various health professions, and/or high-technology job fields.

Q: How do I apply?

A: Contact the admissions office of the college you would like to attend in order to get a copy of the college's application form (many colleges also make their application forms available on their web sites). If you have further questions, or if you'd like to talk to someone about whether the community college experience is right for you, contact the college's counseling office to make an appointment.

Eligibility

Q: Who can attend a community college?

A: Any high school graduate is eligible for admission to a community college. However, you do not have to have a high school diploma as long as you are over eighteen years of age and can benefit from instruction. High school students may be permitted to enroll for "advanced placement" courses provided they have the consent of their school principal and their college president and meet grade-point requirements.

Q: Who goes to a community college?

A: There is no typical community college student. Most of our students fall into the traditional college-age group of under twenty-four, however, vocational students and part-time students tend to be considerably older. Approximately 56 percent of California Community College students are women. Fifty-three percent are members of minority groups (including Asian/Pacific Islander, Filipino, Black, Hispanic, and American Indian, among others). The income level and prior educational backgrounds of community college students vary enormously.

There are as many different types of people at community colleges as there are reasons for going to college. One of the most common reasons for attending a community college is "upward career mobility." Another reason many people enroll is to gain new skills in order to change careers. Of community college students who enroll for these purposes, nearly one-third are over forty years of age. If you are a middle-aged or older person seeking educational opportunities for any reason, you will find many others who share your interests and lifestyle at a community college.

Q: Is it possible to work and attend a community college at the same time?

A: Yes--and almost 80 percent of our students do just that. For those who work during the day, the colleges offer a broad range of evening classes. Part-time, on-campus jobs are often available through the work-study program. Students who work off-campus may be able to get college credit for their work experience through the Cooperative Work Experience Education Program.

Q: May I attend a California Community College if I am not a resident of California?

A: Every California Community College admits some nonresident students. The policies on admitting nonresidents vary from district-to-district. In many districts California residents have enrollment and registration priority. Nonresident students in all districts are charged tuition based on the actual cost of instruction. The estimated statewide average cost of instruction for nonresident students is currently estimated at \$135 per semester unit.

Q: How is California residency determined?

A: The admissions officer of each community college determines student residency status, according to state laws and regulations that specify the residency standards. The legal definition of California residency requires at least one year of physical presence in this state, coupled with the capability and the intent to make California your permanent home. However, if you have initially been classified as a nonresident, you will be required to demonstrate that you have been financially independent for at least three years before being reclassified as a resident. There are additional provisions covering special cases. Contact a college admissions officer for a residency questionnaire and other pertinent information.

Q: May foreign students attend California Community College?

A: Students who are residents of a foreign country may enroll on the same basis as out-of-state students. Most districts provide English as a Second Language (ESL) and other basic, noncredit courses. Foreign students must have an appropriate visa. (Visa information is available from any U.S. Consulate.)

Costs

Q: How much does it cost to attend?

A: An enrollment fee is charged to every student who takes courses for credit. The current resident fee is \$26 per unit. There are also additional expenses--for books, parking, health

services, transcripts, and child care if it applies.

Current estimated annual expenses for a student taking 15 units per semester, with no waiver of fees and living off-campus are: fees (\$330); books and supplies (\$1,224); transportation (\$738); food and housing (\$7,448); and miscellaneous personal expenses (\$1,913).

Approximately 30 percent of community college students partially offset these expenditures with fee waivers.

Q: Are there child care services?

A: There are 98 campuses that currently provide campus child care and development services to students. Fees vary by campus, some using a sliding scale and others a flat hourly fee (approximately \$1-\$5 per hour). Many of these campuses have subsidized child care for eligible students.

Financial Aid

Q: Is financial aid available?

A: Yes. Financial assistance is available for students who need help in meeting their educational costs. Information and applications can be obtained from the financial aid office at every community college. Financial assistance for students may include: grants, low-interest loans, work-study (on- or off-campus), and various privately supported scholarships for outstanding students in particular fields. In addition to the general financial aid programs, the Board of Governors Enrollment Fee Waiver is available which will pay the community college enrollment fee for low-income state resident students. You may inquire about this program at the admissions or financial aid office of the college you plan to attend.

Q: Can I use my G.I. Bill to attend a community college?

A: Yes, you can attend community college on a GI Bill; however, because community colleges are so inexpensive in California (\$18 per unit for in-state residents), you may wish to save that for tuition and fees at a university after you complete two years at a community college.

Program Offerings

Q: May I complete my high school diploma requirements at a community college?

A: Yes. Most community colleges offer adult basic education courses to meet high school requirements. In some regions adult high school-level courses are provided in the evenings at a local high school. Most high schools will accept regular community college courses for credit toward the high school diploma. However, no course taken to fulfill high school requirements may be counted toward an Associate in Arts or Associate in Science degree at a community college.

Q: May I complete my first two years of undergraduate study at a community college?

A: Yes. All California Community Colleges offer courses that meet lower-division (first two years) requirements of a four-year college or university. Trained counselors and advisors can help you plan your community college program to make sure that the courses you select are transferable. You should also refer to the catalog of the college or university to which you plan

to transfer and check its requirements, especially in your major subject. Many community colleges now offer written transfer guarantee programs to specific universities. The transfer center or counseling office will be able to advise you.

Q: What occupational training is offered in community colleges?

A: California Community Colleges can help students get the training needed to qualify for a well-paying job with room for advancement. Career education vocational programs are offered in hundreds of areas that employers need. Areas of vocational (occupational) education include technical and industrial trades, health occupations, business and finance, electronics and computer sciences, agriculture, police and fire science, food science, building and landscaping trades, and many others. Community colleges have up-to-date equipment and facilities and vocational instructors who are experts in their fields. Depending on the occupation you select, training may take from six months to two years. Associate degrees and certificate (limited-term) programs are available for many fields.

Q: Can I take online or correspondence courses through the colleges?

A: The Community Colleges do not offer degrees through correspondence, although they do have a growing number of course offerings on the Internet (called "distance education") and even by cable television (on DISH television's Community College Network, or CCN). To find information about distance education courses and programs in California, you can view a Distance Education Catalog at the web site for the California Virtual Campus www.cvc.edu

Student Services

Q: Does every community college have counselors?

A: Yes. Counselors at every community college are available to help with academic program planning, career counseling, or personal, family, and social problems that affect students' education. Faculty advisers in each department may also help students understand course and major requirements.

Q: If I have special needs, how can community colleges help me?

A: California Community Colleges offer more services for students with special needs than any other colleges. If you have a disability, assistance may be available for you. Each college has a Disabled Students Programs and Services (DSP&S) office where you can receive services and arrange for accommodations. For students with economic, cultural, or language needs, the Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS) provide special counseling, tutoring, and financial aid. If you have a special need, contact the counseling office or the student services office at the college you plan to attend for more information.

Q: Do community colleges offer special help for veterans?

A: Yes. Large numbers of veterans choose community colleges to pursue further training and education after leaving military service. Most community college counselors are familiar with veterans' concerns and options. In addition to counseling, community colleges, through their admissions offices, provide information and assistance with G.I. Bill benefits and the Veterans Educational Assistance Program.

Q: What if I speak very little English?

A: Every community college offers special courses for students who speak English as a second language. The purpose of these courses is to help students gain a command of English in order to succeed in their regular courses of study. Before enrolling in some occupational and academic majors, you may need to demonstrate an adequate level of English skills.

Q: Are there dormitories at community colleges?

A: Because community colleges primarily serve their local areas, most do not have dormitories, and those that do tend to be in more rural areas of the state. The eleven community colleges that do have on-campus housing are Columbia, Kings River, Lassen, Redwoods, Santa Rosa, Shasta, Sierra, Siskiyou, Taft, West Hills, and Yuba (contact information for these colleges can be found at the bottom of this document). Assistance finding off-campus rentals is also available at most colleges.

Community College CalWORKs

Q: How do I find out more about the CalWORKs program?

A: Students who are receiving welfare benefits will find a number of services available to them at their local community college. College staff are available to ensure that once students are enrolled through their local welfare department in the CalWORKs program, they will receive information at the college about the various training and education opportunities that are available through the college. In addition, college staff can provide information about available child care services (both on and off campus); work/study and job placement opportunities, career counseling and other support services designed to help students meet welfare requirements, receive quality training and education, and be assured that educational opportunities will be available to them during the time they are receiving welfare benefits and beyond.

Additional Information

Q: Where can I find specific information on programs and services offered by California Community Colleges?

A: The individual colleges' web sites can be found at http://www.cccco.edu/Camp__Locations/camp._locations.htm (each college site will offer information on its own programs). For more general information, or to search for all colleges within the system that offer a particular area of study, you may wish to explore the California College Explorer web site at <http://www.californiacolleges.edu>. You can also find helpful printed information at high school or college counseling offices, the reference section of the nearest college library, or the public library.