

Fundamentals of a Community College

Community colleges are distinctively unique and differ greatly from traditional four-year colleges and universities, which exist to offer undergraduate degrees and graduate specialty programs. Community colleges are based on the fundamental principles of access and affordability, offering postsecondary options to families, individuals, communities and businesses, who otherwise would not be able to access the benefits of higher education.

- **Accessible** – Community colleges' commitment to accessibility is facilitated by open admissions policies and low tuitions. Consequently, community college enrollments reflect the rich diversity of the nation, and campuses are populated with people of all ages, ethnic and cultural heritages, and socioeconomic backgrounds.
- **Responsive** – Responding to local needs is an integral goal of community colleges. This commitment to local service, coupled with the promotion of lifelong learning, has resulted in multifaceted curricula. Community colleges train the future workforce and instruct employed workers in new technologies. It is no longer uncommon for a person with a college degree to attend a community college for computer courses or to otherwise update work skills.
- **Options** – While occupational and technical programs are the focus for many students, attaining credits that transfer for a baccalaureate degree continues to be a goal for a large segment of the community college population. The number of community college students who need remedial education programs has increased markedly in recent years. Adult education courses that respond to social and recreation interests are also popular at many colleges.
- **Affordable** – Community colleges' low tuitions and financial aid have kept higher education within the reach of many Americans. Although community college tuitions have increased in recent years, they remain significantly lower than those at four-year institutions.
- **Variety** – Community colleges offer a variety of credit and noncredit programs in occupations that the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) predicts will be in demand early into the next decade.
- **Class Size** – Community college students learn in relatively small classes from instructors whose primary responsibility is teaching, not research, and average student-teacher contact time is higher at community colleges than at other higher education institutions.
- **Practical** – Most community colleges have transfer agreements with baccalaureate institutions by which the senior institutions accept community college credits toward four-year degree requirements. Many students choose to complete their freshman and sophomore years of coursework at a community college, thus significantly reducing the cost of a four-year degree.
- **Delivery Models** – Community College delivery models often include on-site, online, hybrid, or a combination of these models.