



# CAREER VISION

## 4 Things You Should Know about Community Colleges

Everybody knows that college costs have increased dramatically throughout the years. According to College Board's [Trends in College Pricing](#) report, **tuition and fees** for 2022 – 2023 averaged:

- \$10,950 at four-year public colleges for in-state residents and \$28,240 out-of-state,
- \$39,400 at private colleges,
- \$3,860 at community colleges for in-district residents.

On top of that, a *moderate annual college budget* (which includes tuition and fees; room and board; books; and other expenses) averaged \$27,940 at public schools and \$57,570 at private colleges.

The above statistics confirm something else you certainly already know...*community colleges are a lot less expensive than four-year schools*. In addition, enrollments in two-year colleges have increased steadily in recent years. But that's no big surprise, right? After all, going to a community college can save you lots of money, whether you're seeking:

- vocational training as part of an [apprenticeship](#) program to work in a trade or craft,
- a [career and technical certificate or degree](#), specializing in applied sciences (including STEM technologies), skilled trades, or other career-focused programs,
- an affordable springboard to a four-year school, graduating with a bachelor's degree.

Even in light of the cost benefits of attending a community college, some people make less-than-flattering comparisons between community and "real" colleges — perpetuating the myth that the credits earned at a two-year college are somehow less valid than those awarded through universities. And rumors can cause some students to rule out community college, even though the programs provide viable pathways to satisfying careers. So, before you decide whether the options offered through 2-year colleges fit with your career goals, make sure you know the facts.



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## Test Your Knowledge

How much do you *really* know about community colleges? Put your knowledge to the test by answering the following questions:

### ***True or False?***

**1. Most students attending a community college didn't get accepted into a four-year school.**

- ✓ *False.* According to [2019 Cooke Foundation Study on College Student Persistence](#), nearly half of all college students begin at a community college. And four out of five community colleges have placed at least one of their students into a selective four-year institution.

**2. Not all community college classes are transferable to a four-year school.**

- ✓ *True.* Community colleges were originally created to give students an affordable way to obtain a bachelor's degree. For that reason, most two-year schools have formal partnerships with public (and sometimes even private) colleges and universities in their area. Each partnership is formalized through an [articulation agreement](#) in order to facilitate a smooth transfer process.

Articulation agreements:

- document the specific transfer policies for a degree or academic program,
- list the *specific courses* the partnering institution will accept for transfer credit,
- guarantee that the associate's degree earned at the community college fulfills *all* of the partner college's general education (gen ed) requirements.

Be sure to meet with an academic or transfer advisor at your community college to ensure that you:

- are taking the *specific courses* that meet articulation agreement requirements,
- don't exceed the maximum transfer credits the partner school accepts (which is typically 60 credit hours),



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- meet grade point average (GPA) requirements to transfer to the partner school *and* to get accepted into your intended major,
- take pre-requisite classes needed for your major.

(For more information about articulation agreements: [Illinois Transfer Portal - iTransfer.org](https://www.illinois-transfer.org/).)

### **3. Community college classes fail to adequately prepare students to earn a bachelor's degree.**

- ✓ *False.* Needless to say — *as is the case with any major life transition* — most students who transfer to a new school go through a period of adjustment.

However, contrary to popular belief, [research](#) shows that a student who transfers from a community college to a 4-year college does so fully prepared to achieve the same grade point average and graduation rate as a student who goes directly to a 4-year school after high school.

What's more, a [2019 Cooke Foundation Study on College Student Persistence](#) shows that community college students who transfer to *highly-selective universities* are more likely to graduate than students who enter directly from high school or transfer from another 4-year school.

Additionally, the above research serves to shatter another common myth: *the gen ed classes offered by community colleges are easy*. That's simply not true. After all, partnering universities provide transfer credit only for the courses that meet their academic requirements as defined by the articulation agreement. So, if you're already attending a four-year school and plan to knock out *Biology 101* at your community college during summer break, don't assume it'll be an "easy A".

### **4. Community college students miss out on the "college experience".**

- ✓ *False.* While it's true that community colleges differ in several ways compared to four-year schools, there are still plenty of opportunities to get involved in campus life. So your college experience depends on the choices you make. Most two-year institutions are making special efforts to foster a sense of community by offering a variety of clubs, sports teams, activities, and cultural events. Some of them also have honors programs, serving as a transfer pipeline to bachelor's programs.



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On the flipside, there's no denying that most students who attend community colleges live at home. So they miss out on dorm life (which is a big part of the transition from living with your parents to becoming independent). However, roughly 25% of community colleges have dorms or nearby housing options. (For more information: [community colleges with on-campus housing](#), AACC's [Community College Finder](#).)

## What's the "Right" Answer?

So how well did you do on the community college quiz? Even if you scored 100%, the most important question remains unanswered — ***"Is community college right for you?"***. Clearly that's not a simple true-false or multiple-choice question. It's an essay question!

To answer it requires an in-depth understanding of your natural talents and interests as well as the types of educational / training environments that fit you well while preparing you for a successful and satisfying career.