Community colleges stand for access and opportunity

Community colleges play a unique and vital role to provide opportunities for individuals and economic vitality for our nation. Their comprehensive missions, open admissions policies, and breadth of offerings ensure that people of all socioeconomic backgrounds—from new immigrants to laid-off workers—have access to the education and services they seek to help secure their future success.

“American community colleges are the nation’s overlooked asset. As the United States confronts the challenges of globalization, two-year institutions are simply indispensable to the American future. They are the Ellis Island of American higher education, the crossroads at which K–12 education meets higher education, and the institutions that give students the tools to navigate the modern world.”

Community colleges are centers of opportunity

They are the most affordable institutions of higher education with average annual tuition of only $2,361 per year; the most accessible, within a 25-mile drive from 90% of the U.S. population; and the most egalitarian, serving about half of all minority and first-generation college goers and two-thirds of adult learners seeking new skills and a better quality of life. And they are gateways to global understanding, welcoming thousands of international students each year.

Community College Students as a Percentage of U.S. Undergraduates

- 46% All U.S undergraduates
- 55% First-generation college students
- 41% First-time freshmen
- 55% Native American
- 46% Asian/Pacific Islander
- 46% Black
- 55% Hispanic

Employment Status

- 27% Full-time students employed full time
- 50% Full-time students employed part time
- 50% Part-time students employed full time
- 33% Part-time students employed part time

Source: National Center for Education Statistics.

Today, the nation’s 1,195 community colleges enroll almost half (46%) of all U.S. undergraduates

Over 6.5 million credit and an estimated 5 million noncredit students attend community college each year. These numbers are growing, driven by rising tuitions at 4-year institutions and a government shift away from need-based aid and toward student loans; significant increases in the college-going population; and workplace demands for better educated, higher-skilled workers.

11.5 Million Total Student Enrollment

- 6.5 Million credit
- 5 Million noncredit

Enrollment in Credit Courses

- 41% Enrolled full time
- 59% Enrolled part time

Source: National Center for Education Statistics and AACC.

At least 57% of job openings in the United States between 2006 and 2016 will require some postsecondary education.

Community colleges need committed support to be able to prepare a locally responsive and globally competitive workforce

Community colleges play an important role in the economic vitality of the nation. But caught between rapidly rising demand and repeated state budget cuts, colleges struggle to maintain their core mission and open access and rarely have active alumni bases and large endowments to fall back on.

Revenue Sources (public colleges)

State funds: 37%
Local funds: 21%
Tuition and fees: 17%
Federal funds: 16%
Other: 9%

Source: National Center for Education Statistics.

State and Local Appropriations: FY 2008
(in millions of dollars)

$15,324 Public Community Colleges
$62,180 Public and Private 4-Year Colleges

Enrollment by Gender

40% Men
60% Women

Source: National Center for Education Statistics.

Average Student Age: 29

16% Age 40 or older
42% Age 22–39
43% Age 21 or younger

Detail does not equal 100% due to rounding.

Community College Enrollments

35% Minorities
13% Black
15% Hispanic
6% Asian/Pacific Islander
1% Native American
39% First generation to attend college
17% Single parents
8% Non-U.S. citizens
Community colleges at the forefront

Health care: 59% of new nurses and the majority of other new health-care workers are educated at community colleges.

Teacher preparation: Researchers estimate that 20% to 40% of the nation’s teachers began their education at community colleges.

Workforce training: 95% of businesses and organizations that employ community college graduates recommend community college workforce education and training programs.

Homeland security: Close to 80% of firefighters, law enforcement officers, and EMTs are credentialed at community colleges.

Online education: Students at 41% of public community colleges can earn a degree entirely online.

Sustainability: Community colleges are working to improve the energy efficiency of their campuses, infuse sustainability into curricula, and train much of the nation’s renewable energy workforce.

Nationally, half of all baccalaureate degree recipients attended community colleges prior to earning their degrees.

Community colleges award 550,000 associate degrees and 295,000 certificates each year.

Help keep the doors to opportunity open

Now more than ever, community colleges need advocacy and committed financial support from both the public and private sectors. Please contact development@aacc.nche.edu for more information or to learn how you can help ensure access for all at the nation’s community colleges.

Many futures are riding on community colleges, including our nation’s.

The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) serves as the primary advocacy organization for the nation’s community colleges. AACC’s projects are at the forefront of change in education, from programs that tackle the serious problems of students dropping out of or failing in college, to acute shortages of health-care professionals, to the growing need to reengage millions of adult learners to strengthen our workforce.

One Dupont Circle, NW
Suite 410
Washington, DC 20036
www.aacc.nche.edu • 202-728-0200

This publication is made possible through funding from the Ford Foundation, as part of a grant to AACC to represent and advocate for the needs of community colleges among diverse constituencies and stakeholder groups.