

community colleges in the USA



WHAT DO ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER, CALVIN KLEIN, TOM HANKS, AND NASA SPACE SHUTTLE COMMANDER EILEEN COLLINS HAVE IN COMMON? THEY ALL ATTENDED COMMUNITY COLLEGE.

COMMUNITY COLLEGES ARE THE FASTEST GROWING INSTITUTIONAL TYPE IN THE US. THERE ARE NOW MORE THAN 1,200 PUBLIC AND INDEPENDENT COMMUNITY COLLEGES TO CHOOSE FROM.

THE TOP TEN BENEFITS OF ATTENDING A U.S. COMMUNITY COLLEGE

COMMUNITY COLLEGES ARE THE GATEWAY TO HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES FOR THE FOLLOWING REASONS:

1 Lower Cost

Community college tuition and fees average \$6,500 per year, which is significantly lower than at 4-year colleges and universities. Students can lower the overall cost of a bachelor's degree by taking the first 2 years of course credits at a community college.

2 Excellent Transfer Opportunities

Most community colleges have agreements with 4-year colleges and universities (called articulation or "2 + 2" transfer agreements) which allow students to transfer their community college credits toward a university degree. Thus, students first go to a community college for 2 years of study, obtain an associate degree, and then complete 2 years at a university to obtain a bachelor's degree.

Good to Know: Many state universities give preference to qualified students who transfer from a community college in that state.

3 Flexible English Proficiency Requirements

Because community colleges provide their own assessment and offer Intensive English Programs (IEPs) to students who require additional English proficiency, TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) scores are not always critical to the admissions process. Further, some community colleges will accept an IELTS (International English Language Testing System) score in place of the TOEFL score.

4 Focus on Teaching and Student Success

Community college students enjoy a great deal of personal attention from their professors. Additionally, community colleges seek out faculty with work experience in their subject area, adding a real-world perspective to students' studies.

5 Small Class Sizes

The average community college class size is between 15 and 20 students which allows professors to devote more time to individual students and for students to interact with each other. Small classes are highly beneficial for international students who may need to adjust to the pace of U.S. academic life and practice their English-language skills.

Learn about vocational/career programs, English as a second language, or find a two-year college that's right for you:
www.communitycollegeUSA.com



ARTICLE ON INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AT COMMUNITY COLLEGES

- Providing Services Through Disability Offices
- Accessing Health Care and Insurance Issues
- Resources: [Mobility International USA](#)

6 Additional Practical Training Opportunity

International students with F-1 visa status are eligible to do one year of Optional Practical Training (OPT) in their field of study immediately following completion of an associate degree, and a second year of OPT immediately following completion of a bachelor's degree.

7 Use of the Latest Technologies

Because of their strong ties with business and industry, most community colleges are equipped with state-of-the-art technologies, classrooms, and facilities. Community colleges lead the nation in educating students in cutting-edge fields such as biomedical engineering, biotechnology, robotics, laser optics, Internet and computer technologies, and geographic information systems.

8 Hundreds of Programs to Choose From

Community colleges offer programs in all major fields of study which can transfer to 4-year colleges and universities. Majors range from art to political science to zoology. Programs especially popular among international students currently include business, engineering, computer science, computer graphics, Internet technology, multimedia, hotel management, restaurant management, psychology, accounting, early childhood education, and environmental conservation.

9 Opportunities to Experience U.S. Culture

Because community colleges have strong ties to their surrounding communities, they offer international students both a rich academic environment and a unique opportunity to experience many aspects of life in the United States—both on and off campus.

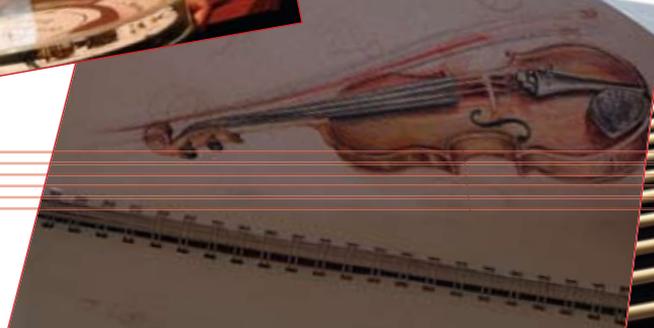
10 Excellent Student Support Services

Community colleges are committed to attracting a diverse student population and ensuring that all students succeed. The colleges offer a variety of support services and cross-cultural programs, including tutoring, advising, career planning, study skills and counseling — many of which are designed specifically for international students.

JUDITH IRWIN

*Director – International Programs & Services
American Association of Community Colleges (AACC)*

www.communitycollegeUSA.com



INTENSIVE ENGLISH PROGRAMS

Visit **Intensive English USA Online**, a leading global resource guide to intensive English programs in the US: www.IntensiveEnglishUSA.org

INTENSIVE ENGLISH PROGRAMS (IEPs) OFFER CONCENTRATED ENGLISH LANGUAGE TRAINING TO NONNATIVE SPEAKERS.

Many international students attend IEPs in the United States to acquire the English skills necessary to gain admission to U.S. undergraduate or graduate programs. Others aim to improve their English to meet professional or personal goals.

- **Affiliation:** A program is not necessarily better or worse because it is affiliated with a university. Instead, consider indicators such as class size, faculty (% with TESOL, ESL or related certification), location, program size, class size, diversity of student population, price, length of study, and levels of study offered.
- **Accreditation:** Intensive English Programs obtain accreditation through various regional accrediting bodies. IEPs housed within colleges or universities receive accreditation when their college or university is accredited.
- **Extras:** Some programs offer special services such as airport pickup, housing assistance, academic counseling, visa/tax counseling, conversation partners, field trips, home stays, host families, student parties, and coffee hours.

REBECCA PRICE is the Director of the ESL and ELI Programs at Howard Community College in Columbia, Maryland.

TAMARA JONES is the lead instructor at Howard Community College and the Intensive English Program Chair for TESOL.

CARL DE ANGELIS is Director of Enrichment and Professional Development at the Institute of International Education.

HERE ARE SOME QUESTIONS THAT YOU SHOULD ASK ABOUT COMMUNITY COLLEGES

1 Is the community college accredited?

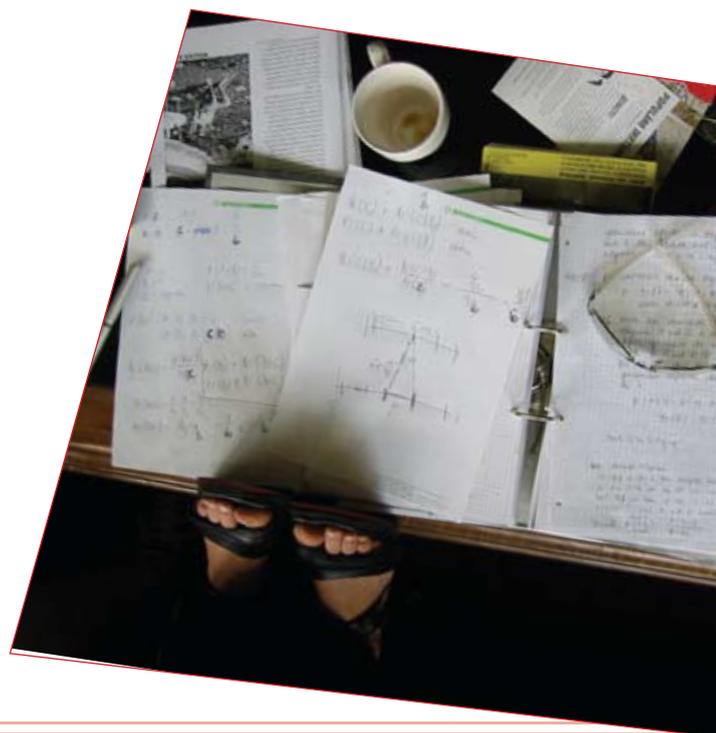
The accreditation process for community colleges follows the same standards as a four-year institution, as set by the U.S. Department of Education and the state. For more information, contact your EducationUSA adviser or visit: www.ope.ed.gov/accreditation.

2 What is the transfer rate to selective four-year universities?

Many community colleges are a part of a statewide system that allows transfer to third-year standing to four-year colleges and universities. Some community colleges focus on delivering high academic programs for this purpose, while others focus on short-term certificate and vocational programs.

3 How successful are the graduates from the community college?

Transfer and employment data about alumni are available from community college counseling and international centers as well as alumni offices.





4 What is the average class size? What is the average teacher/student ratio?

Community colleges, which focus on teaching rather than research, often have smaller classes, especially in the introductory courses in the sciences and math, taught by faculty rather than by graduate teaching assistants.

5 Can you study your major at this school?

Community colleges provide a comprehensive curriculum that covers the first two years of university study: General Studies or General Education. The concept of studying these foundation courses the first two years is new to many prospects who are more familiar with other educational systems.

6 What will be the cost of your education?

Community colleges charge additional tuition and fees for international students.

7 Do I have to take English? Do you require a TOEFL or IELTS score?

Most community colleges require a TOEFL or IELTS score primarily for admission purposes.

8 Where will I live? Do you have housing on campus?

Few community colleges have dormitories. Most have housing recommendations for home stays, off campus apartments, and sharing with current students.

9 Do you have scholarships?

Some community colleges offer incentives such as a reduction in in-state tuition or may be willing to waive an application fee. Others offer scholarship cash awards based on academic achievement to prospects or only after the first year of study.

10 Can I work on or off campus? Can I get a social security card?

Depending upon the institution, international students can work on campus for limited hours. They are required to obtain a social security card in order to be employed on campus. Each school has its own way to assist in this process. After completing a full course of study, they may file for Practical Training and work full time in a field related to their major.

11 Can I attend before I turn 18? Can I attend without finishing high school?

Community colleges vary in their requirements for admission. Many, however, require the students to be high school (or equivalent) graduates and be 18 years of age.

12 Can I apply online?

Many community colleges offer online applications for domestic students, yet not for international students due to the number of original documents required for admission.

13 Can I transfer credits from my current school?

Community colleges have academic relationships with other accredited colleges and universities. Many community colleges will accept some credits from other U.S. schools. Few community colleges accept coursework from foreign schools unless there is a formal agreement between these two institutions.

14 Do I need to take the SAT?

Community colleges admit students in an Open Enrollment System, based on high school graduation and age. The SAT is not required.

ELENA GARATE, PH.D. is
Dean of International Education at
Santa Monica College in California

EducationUSA advisers in 170 countries provide accurate, unbiased information about all accredited U.S. higher education institutions. Find your EducationUSA center at: www.educationUSA.state.gov/centers
Articles for this handout were originally published in EducationUSA Connections (July, 2007).

