Community Colleges

About 6.4 million students were enrolled in public two-year colleges in fall 2007. Almost 40% of these students were enrolled full-time. Community colleges enrolled 40% of all undergraduate students in fall 2007, but only 24% of full-time undergraduates.

Tuition and Fees

Tuition and fees at public two-year colleges in 2009-10 average $2,544, a 7.3% increase over the $2,372 average published price in 2008-09. Although the percentage increase in average tuition and fees at public two-year colleges was higher than the increases in other sectors from 2008-09 to 2009-10, published prices have increased much more slowly than those at either public four-year or private not-for-profit four-year colleges over the past decade.

From 1999–2000 to 2009–10, average published tuition and fees at public two-year colleges increased 18% per year after adjusting for inflation, compared to 4.9% at public four-year and 2.6% at private not-for-profit four-year institutions.

The 1.8% constant dollar increase in published annual tuition and fees at public two-year colleges for the decade 1999–2000 to 2009-10 was lower than both the 3.4% rate of increase from 1979-80 to 1989-90 and the 3.9% rate of increase from 1989-90 to 1999–2000.

The average total budget for a full-time community college student is $14,285 in 2009-10. Tuition and fees are just 18% of the total. Room and board, books and supplies, transportation, and other costs account for the rest of the expenses community college students face.

Published prices and the rate of change in those prices vary considerably across states and regions of the country.

Community college prices in California, where 17% of full-time students in this sector are enrolled, are substantially lower than in other states. The average price of public two-year colleges outside of California is $2,917, 6.2% higher than in 2008-09.

By state, average tuition and fees for full-time students in 2009-10 range from lows of $817 in California and $1,204 in New Mexico, to highs of $5,888 in New Hampshire and $6,070 in Vermont.

By region, average tuition and fees for public two-year colleges in 2009-10 range from $1,475 in the West to $3,992 in New England.

Average Grant Aid and Net Price for Public Two-Year College Students, 2007-08

In 2007-08, institutional grant aid (non-need-based and need-based) at public two-year institutions averaged about $160 for dependent students attending full-time. Those from families with incomes below $32,500 received an average of $200 per student, while those with incomes of $100,000 or higher received an average of $80 per student.

In 2007-08, about half of the total institutional grant dollars at public two-year colleges were distributed without regard to financial circumstances.

Full-time low-income dependent students at public two-year colleges received an average of $3,130 in total grant aid in 2007-08. Those with incomes between $32,500 and $59,999 received an average of $1,200 per year.

The lowest-income students at public two-year colleges received, on average, enough grant aid to cover their entire tuition and fees. However, these students faced an average of $6,480 in room and board, books and supplies, transportation, and other costs after grant aid in 2007-08.
The average net price paid by full-time students at public two-year colleges has declined steadily since 1997-98. Since 2006-07, for full-time students at public two-year colleges, average total grant aid from all sources, when combined with estimated federal education tax credits and deductions, has covered average tuition and fees and contributed somewhat to other college expenses.

In 2009-10, the average $3,000 in grant aid and tax benefits received by these students covered average tuition and fees of $2,540, and provided about $460 toward average living expenses.

In 2007-08, students at public two-year colleges, who accounted for 32% of full-time equivalent undergraduate enrollments, received 30% of Pell Grant funds. These students received only 14% of Academic Competitiveness Grants (ACG). These grants are limited to first- and second-year Pell Grant recipients who graduated from high school after Jan. 1, 2005, and have completed a rigorous secondary school program. Before 2009-10, these grants were not available to part-time students.

Public two-year college students received only 9% of campus-based aid in 2007-08. Unlike Pell Grants, which are allocated to students directly by the federal government, Federal Work-Study, Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (FSEOG) and Perkins Loans are allotted to institutions based on a complex formula and then distributed to students with financial need enrolled in those institutions.

Among students earning associate degrees from public two-year colleges in 2007-08, 62% graduated with no debt and another 23% had borrowed less than $10,000.

Five percent of community college students graduated with $20,000 of debt or more. Among those receiving associate degrees from for-profit institutions, 98% had borrowed and 42% graduated with $20,000 of debt or more.