

Trends in Community College Education: Enrollment, Prices, Student Aid, and Debt Levels

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Community colleges serve as the access point to higher education for many students. With lower published prices, less stringent admission requirements, and geographical proximity to more students than most institutions in other sectors, community colleges provide opportunities for education and training that would otherwise be unavailable to many. As the need increases for workers with some postsecondary education, but not necessarily a four-year degree, the demands on community colleges are growing.

Published Prices

In 2010-11, average tuition and fees for a full-time student enrolled in a public two-year college are \$2,713, compared to \$7,605 at public four-year institutions and significantly higher levels at private for-profit and nonprofit institutions.

TABLE 1: Average Tuition and Fees by Sector, 2010-11 (Enrollment-Weighted)

Sector	2010-11
Public Two-Year	\$2,713
Public Four-Year In-State	\$7,605
Public Four-Year Out-of-State	\$19,595
Private Nonprofit Four-Year	\$27,293
Private For-Profit	\$13,935

Source: The College Board, *Trends in College Pricing 2010*, Table 1a.

This relatively low price constitutes less than 20% of the total annual expenses the typical student faces while enrolled at a community college. After adding food and housing, books and supplies, transportation, and other miscellaneous basic expenses, the total budget for public two-year college students averages close to \$15,000.

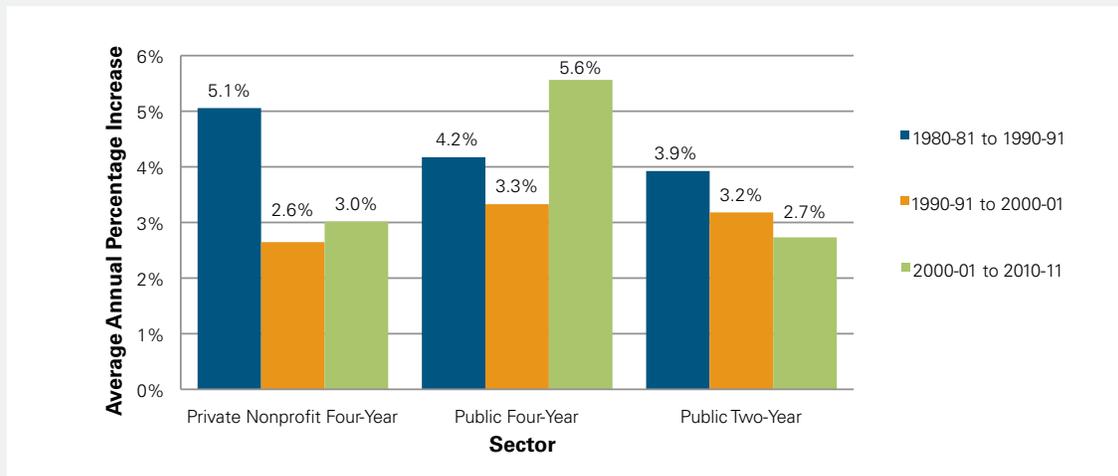
TABLE 2: Total Estimated Average Budget for Full-Time Community College Students Commuting to Campus and Not Living with Parents, 2010-11

	Tuition and Fees	Off-Campus Room and Board	Books and Supplies	Transportation	Other Expenses	Total Expenses
Public Two-Year	\$2,713	\$7,259	\$1,133	\$1,491	\$2,041	\$14,637

Source: The College Board, *Trends in College Pricing 2010*, Table 6.

While average published tuition and fees at public four-year colleges and universities increased much more rapidly from 2000-01 to 2010-11 than over the previous two decades, the increase of 2.7% per year at public two-year colleges was lower than the growth rates of the previous two decades.

FIGURE 1: Average Annual Percentage Increase in Inflation-Adjusted Tuition and Fees by Decade, 1980-81 to 2010-11



Source: The College Board, *Trends in College Pricing 2010*, Figure 4.

Variation Across States

Although the national average tuition at public two-year colleges is relatively low, there is considerable variation across states. Published prices range from \$820 in California, where about 20% of full-time community college students are enrolled, \$1,326 in New Mexico, and \$1,773 in North Carolina to \$4,936 in Minnesota, \$6,250 in Vermont, and \$6,258 in New Hampshire.

Over the five years from 2005-06 to 2010-11, community college tuition and fees increased by less than \$500 in 13 states and by over \$1,000 in 9 states.¹

Institutional Revenues

The proportion of total educational expenses at community colleges covered by net tuition revenues increased from 24% in 2001-02 to 29% in 2007-08.² These revenues constitute about 16% of total revenues for community colleges. The largest source of revenue is state appropriations, but local governments also provide a significant portion of funding for public two-year colleges.

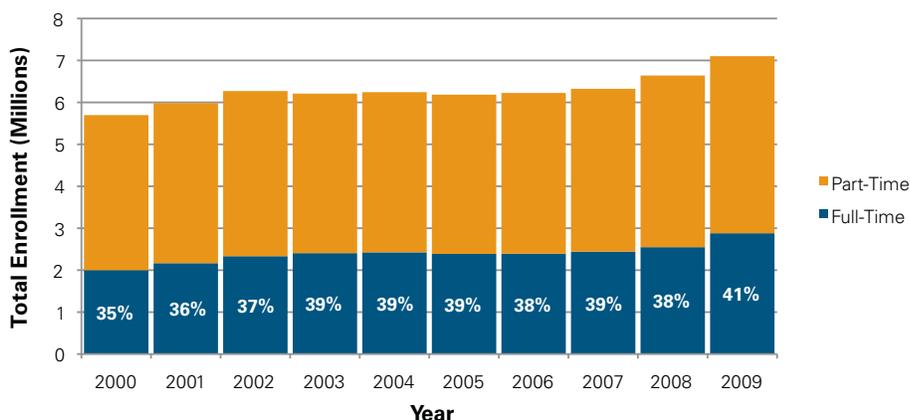
TABLE 3: Revenue Sources for Community Colleges, 2008-09

Revenue Source	Percentage of Total
State Appropriations, Grants, and Contracts	34%
Local Appropriations, Grants, and Contracts	20%
Federal Appropriations, Grants and Contracts	16%
Tuition and Fees	16%
Other Sources	13%

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.
 Source: National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), *Digest of Education Statistics 2010*, Table 362.

Enrollments

FIGURE 2: Full-Time and Part-Time Enrollment in Public Two-Year Colleges, Fall 2000 to Fall 2009 (With Percentage Full-Time)



Source: The College Board, *Trends in College Pricing 2010*, Tables 17a and 17b; NCES, *Digest of Education Statistics 2010*, Table 204.

Total fall enrollment in community colleges increased from 5.7 million in 2000 to 6.2 million in 2005 and 7.1 million in 2009. In 2009, 2.9 million students (41% of the total) were enrolled full-time.

TABLE 4: Distribution of Fall Undergraduate Enrollment by Sector: 1990, 2000, and 2009

	All Undergraduates			Full-Time Undergraduates		
	1990	2000	2009	1990	2000	2009
Public Four-Year	39%	36%	36%	51%	46%	44%
Private Nonprofit Four-Year	16%	16%	15%	22%	21%	19%
Public Two-Year	42%	43%	40%	25%	25%	26%
Private For-Profit	2%	5%	9%	2%	6%	11%
Other	1%	1%	< 1%	1%	1%	< 1%

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

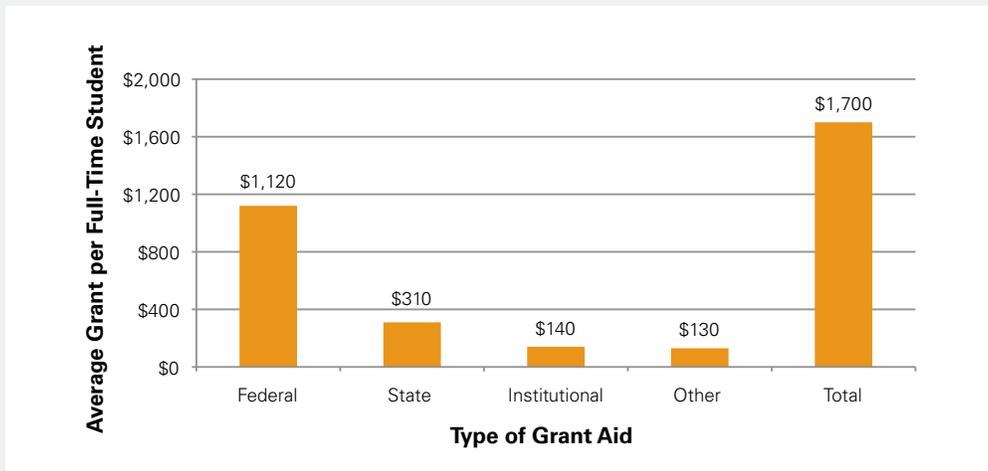
Source: NCES, *IPEDS* unpublished data; NCES, *Digest of Education Statistics 2010*, Table 202.

Enrollment growth in community colleges has not led to an increasing share of total enrollments in that sector. Instead, a growing proportion of both full-time enrollment and total undergraduate enrollment is in the for-profit postsecondary sector.

Student Aid

In 2007-08, students received an average of \$1,700 in grant aid to pay their tuition and, in some cases, cover a fraction of their other expenses. Two-thirds of this aid came from the federal government, primarily in the form of Pell Grants. The remainder came from a combination of state grants, institutional grants, and funding from employers and other private sources.

FIGURE 3: Average Grant Aid per Full-Time Student, Public Two-Year Colleges, 2007-08



Note: "Federal" grants include all federal grants, including Veterans and DOD benefits. "Other" grants include grants from employers and other private sources.
Source: NCES, *National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS), 2008*.

Students in public two-year colleges receive a much larger proportion of federal Pell Grants than of other types of federal aid. In 2008-09, when they constituted 31% of total undergraduate full-time equivalent students (FTEs) and 27% of postsecondary FTEs, these students received 31% of Pell Grant funds and 15% of Academic Competitiveness Grants, which are distributed to Pell Grant recipients meeting specified criteria for academic preparation. Students in this sector received 8% of subsidized and 6% of unsubsidized Stafford Loans and their parents borrowed less than 1% of all PLUS Loans.*

TABLE 5: Percentage of Federal Financial Aid Going to Students in the Public Two-Year Sector, 2008-09

	Percentage of Total
Pell Grants	31%
Campus-Based Aid	10%
ACG Grants	15%
Subsidized Stafford Loans	8%
Unsubsidized Stafford Loans	6%
PLUS Loans	1%

Source: The College Board, *Trends in Student Aid 2010*, Figure 7.

*Only undergraduate students are eligible for Pell Grants. Both undergraduate and graduate students participate in the Stafford and PLUS loan programs.

Student Debt

Community college students are less likely than students enrolled in other sectors to rely on student loans. The difference is in large part a result of the lower prices they face, but many higher education professionals are concerned that these students are not borrowing enough and are instead working excessively and enrolling part-time.³ These patterns make it more difficult for them to succeed in earning degrees and certificates.

TABLE 6: Distribution of Total Undergraduate Debt by Sector and Type of Degree or Certificate, 2007-08

	No Debt	Less than \$10,000	\$10,000 to \$19,999	\$20,000 to \$29,999	\$30,000 to \$39,999	\$40,000 or more	Total
Bachelor's Degree							
Public Four-Year	38%	16%	19%	14%	6%	6%	100%
Private Nonprofit Four-Year	28%	10%	19%	17%	10%	15%	100%
Private For-Profit	4%	4%	12%	23%	33%	24%	100%
Associate Degree							
Public Two-Year	62%	23%	9%	3%	1%	1%	100%
Private For-Profit	2%	22%	34%	23%	13%	6%	100%
Certificate							
Public Two-Year	70%	21%	7%	1%	1%	<1%	100%
Private For-Profit	10%	46%	34%	8%	2%	1%	100%

Note: Data include federal loans, private loans, and loans from states and institutions. Parent PLUS Loans, credit card debt, and loans from friends and family are not included. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding. Data include students who attended less than half-time (13% of students), and who do not qualify for Stafford Loans but do qualify for some nonfederal loans.

Source: The College Board, *Trends in Student Aid 2010*, Figure 19A.

In 2007-08, 62% of associate degree recipients and 70% of certificate recipients graduated from community colleges without student debt. This compares to 2% and 10%, respectively, of those who received similar credentials from for-profit institutions. Only about 5% of community college associate degree recipients and 2% of certificate recipients graduated with debt of \$20,000 or higher.

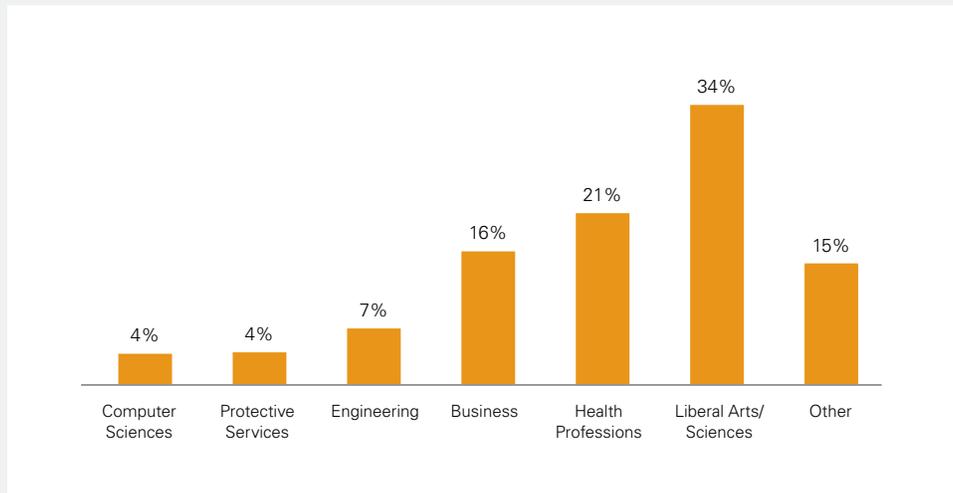
In 2007-08, 17% of full-time community college students (and 10% of all community college students) borrowed through the federal Stafford Loan program. Only 6% of full-time students in this sector (and 4% of all students) relied on private student loans.

Degree Completion

Available national data on completion rates at community colleges are inadequate because they include only first-time full-time students, who constitute a minority at these institutions. However, among the 2005 starting cohort, only 21% of those registered as degree-seeking completed associate degrees or certificates within 150% of the normal time. At for-profit institutions, this figure was 58%.⁴

Among students who earned associate degrees in 2007-08, about one-third studied liberal arts and sciences. Health profession fields accounted for 21% of associate degrees awarded in 2007-08.

FIGURE 4: Fields of Study of Associate Degree Recipients, 2007-08



Source: The College Board, *Trends in College Pricing 2010*, Figure 20A; NCES, *The Condition of Education 2010*, Indicator 41.

Endnotes:

¹The College Board, *Trends in College Pricing 2010*, Table 6C.

²The College Board, *Trends in College Pricing 2010*, Figure 12A; The Delta Cost Project.

³The Institute for College Access and Success (TICAS), *Getting With the Program: Community College Students Need Access to Federal Student Loans, 2009*, http://ticas.org/pub_view.php?idx=511.

⁴NCES, *Digest of Education Statistics 2010*, Table 341.