
Study at a Community College

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What is a community college?

Community Colleges are a very important part of the American university system. They provide a wide range of academic and professional programs. The most popular program is the two-year university-transfer Associate's Degree in which students finish the first and second years of their bachelor's degree, and then transfer to a four-year university to complete the third and fourth years of the BA or BS degree. Most large community colleges offer a wide variety of courses, so that students can progress in their majors as well as complete their general education requirements for university. Community colleges also offer one- and two-year certificates and degrees in many areas of professional and technical training for career preparation

Lower Cost of Tuition

Studying at a community college is generally much less expensive than studying at a four-year university. Many American and international students attend community colleges to save money so they will have more financial resources available when they transfer to a four-year university. For example, at a community college in Washington State, the average international student may be able to save as much as \$15,000 over two years before transferring to a university.

Excellent University Transfer Programs

An Associate of Arts degree, which takes about two years to complete, is generally equal to 50% of the required credits for a Bachelor's degree. Specially trained advisors are available to help international students with every step of the university transfer process, from first enrollment at the community college through graduation and transfer to a four-year university. A two-year graduate will have the advantage of having American course work, grades, and teachers' recommendations that will make it much easier to gain admission to a university. In other words, the student transferring from a two-year program has a kind of "insider's advantage", and will also find it much easier to choose the right university program in the huge US university system, and will more easily avoid expensive mistakes.

Small Classes and High Quality Instruction

Community college classes are usually quite small and provide students more classroom interaction and more individual attention from their instructors. Most university-level classes have a maximum of 25-30 students per class, while English as a Second Language (ESL) classes are usually even smaller. All instructors who teach in community college academic classes must have a Master's degree, and over 16% possess Doctorates (Ph.Ds.) Community colleges do not use graduate Teaching Assistants to provide instruction.

Faster English Language Improvement with Host Family Program

Unlike four-year universities, community colleges usually do not have dormitories or student housing. This is not really a disadvantage, however, because international students who live with host families will improve their English much more quickly than students who live in dormitories or apartments. Of course, many international students do choose to live in apartments near college and often share in order to reduce costs.

Meeting English language proficiency requirements for admission

International students seeking admission to university-level classes at a community college need to meet the college's English language proficiency requirement, normally a minimum TOEFL exam score. Many international students enroll in a community college ESL or Intensive English program specifically to improve their English and then move into university-level academic programs.

Personalized Advising Services

Most community colleges offer international students personalized advising and services through their international education offices. At Pierce College, our international program is small and friendly and advisors and staff know each international student by name. Students receive help in many areas, from visa issues and academic advising to finding a doctor or dentist, or to adjusting to life in the United States. Our International Programs office also organizes social and cultural activities. At Pierce College, we help our international students to have the best experience possible, both academically and personally, during their stay in the U.S.A. and at our college.

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