

Community Colleges - the American trend

More international students are attending community colleges. They see community colleges as a starting point in their effort to earn a four-year or graduate degree from a U.S. university. Andrea Insley explains



Community colleges are a popular alternative for the first two years of a bachelor's degree. These first two years are designed to provide a strong foundation of general knowledge before a student begins concentrating on a major field of study. Four-year colleges and universities are usually strongest at providing higher level training. Community colleges focus on the introductory first and second years.

Transfers and Job Training

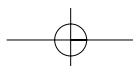
As a matter of fact, many university advisors recommend that students attend community college "college transfer" programs first, and then transfer into universities for the final two years. The students transfer credits from the community colleges to the university to earn a four-year degree (2+2).

In addition to college transfer programs, community colleges offer a wide range of

professional/technical (job-training) programs. These programs train students in hundreds of careers from business administration and computer programming to advertising art. Students who complete these courses receive degrees or certificates and are prepared to begin work in their chosen professions.

Helping the Local Community

Community Colleges meet the educational and vocational needs of



BENEFITS OF ATTENDING COMMUNITY COLLEGES

You can transfer to excellent four-year universities

For example, Seattle Central Community College has approximately 700 international students (over 10,000 American students). Most of their college level international students are in the College Transfer program. After completing a two-year Associate degree with good grades, they are able to transfer to universities in junior (3rd year) standing. Students have transferred to universities all over the country such as Boston University, University of Arizona, UCLA, University of Oregon, Michigan State University, and the University of Washington.

Community colleges offer excellent professional/technical programs

If you aren't interested in a bachelor's degree, you are offered programs in professions such as information technology, business, nursing, biotechnology, graphic design, commercial photography, culinary arts, wireless communication technologies, or apparel design. Training and certificates in these programs allow you to enter the workforce directly.

Community colleges are less expensive

Community college tuition is much less expensive than four-year colleges and universities. Tuition at community colleges can be as much as 20% to 80% less at four-year colleges and universities particularly if the four-year institution is private.

Community college classes are smaller

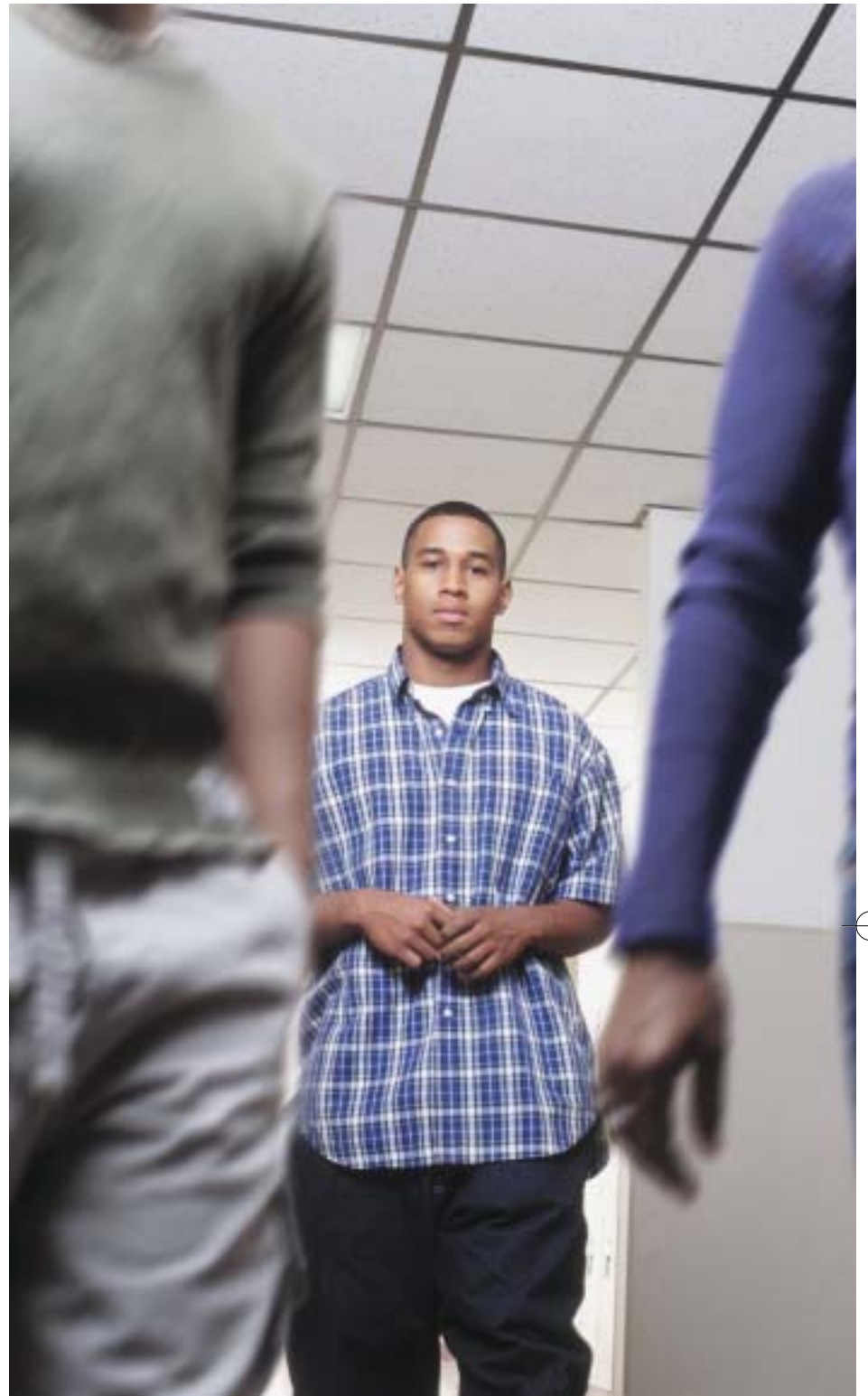
Community colleges are often smaller than four-year state institutions. Classes are smaller, too. Average community college class size is 25-35 students. In contrast, some introductory level courses at state universities are in lecture halls with 150-300 or more students in class. Obviously, teachers and advisors are able to provide more personal attention to students at a community college. Many U.S. and international students say that attending smaller schools for the first two years helps them make a good transition into larger four-year schools for the final two years.


Community college instructors are professional educators

At many large state universities, you will have a "teaching assistant" (T.A.) as your instructor for introductory courses during the first two years. These T.A's are graduate students who earn money for college by teaching courses in the field that they are studying. For example, a graduate student in Biology can often be the instructor of your Biology 101 course.

Community college Admission is easier

TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) and academic requirements are usually lower for admission to community colleges than to four-year institutions. Many community colleges also offer intensive English as a Second Language programs for students whose TOEFL score is too low. Two years at a community college can help an international student improve language skills and grow accustomed to the U.S. educational system and way of life.



local communities. A recent article in U.S. News and World Report noted that the vast majority of American students who are studying for a bachelor's degree complete the first two years at a community college and then transfer to the university for the last two years. By maintaining an "open door policy" with low tuition costs and few entrance requirements, community colleges have offered many U.S. citizens a chance to get a college education. 

Andrea Insley Ed.D is Dean of International Education Programs at Seattle Central Community College, Seattle, Washington State. Seattle Central currently has over 700 international students studying at it campus, many of whom transfer to prestigious universities to complete their 3rd and 4th year of a Bachelor's Degree.