



Community College:

A first step to a bachelor's degree

Community college is an excellent, popular, and low-cost option for California students who want to transfer to a four-year state university. About 28% of high school graduates go to community college immediately after graduation.

About one-third of University of California (UC) and two-thirds of California State University (CSU) graduates began at a community college.

If I'm going to a community college first, does it matter how well I do in high school?

Not working hard in high school will make college more difficult. When you apply at a community college—*whether or not you have a high school diploma*—you will likely be assessed through placement tests and other measures, such as your high school grades, to determine what level of English and math classes you are ready for. Some students end up taking remedial classes, for which they receive no credit. These courses can lengthen their stay in community college and thereby increase the cost of their education. These students are also less likely than their better-prepared counterparts to transfer to a four-year university. Try to take English and math all four years in high school so it will be easier for you to pass these placement tests.

How do I know if I am prepared for college-level work?

First, take the college-prep courses at your high school and work to get grades of A, B, or C.

In addition, at some high schools in your junior year, you can take an expanded version of the English and math STAR tests. If you test proficient or above, CSU considers you ready for college. If you don't test proficient, then you can improve your skills and knowledge by taking English and math courses offered at your high school or community college during your senior year.

Although all high schools must give the STAR tests, each high school can decide whether to offer the expanded CSU version. If you are a junior, ask your high school counselor or principal if it would be appropriate for you to take this expanded version.

Once I'm enrolled at a community college, what do I need to do to transfer to a four-year university?

Generally students take the first two years' worth of college-level requirements—called lower-division courses—before transferring as a junior to a state university. That adds up to 60 semester or 90 quarter units. (Quarters are generally about 10 weeks long compared to 16 to 18 weeks in a semester. Simply multiply semester units by 1 1/2 to change them into quarter units.)

Community college transfer students are first in line at UC

UC campuses give *first priority* to eligible community college transfer students over all others, including transfers from a CSU. And UC and CSU do not require admissions tests from transfer students.

If you want to transfer before you have taken 60 semester units, go online at www.ucop.edu/pathways for UC and www.csumentor.edu for CSU to find out about alternatives. Also be sure to talk with a college counselor.

What are lower-division units?

General education (GE) requirements make up more than half of these lower-division units. GE requirements cover all areas of academic interest—arts, humanities, social sciences, sciences, math, and English—and are required by all universities as a way to ensure that students have a well-rounded education.

The rest of the units should be in courses that prepare you for your major. Generally, students who have taken all the GE requirements and the lower-division (freshman and sophomore) classes for their major stand a better chance of transferring to the university of their choice.

To receive credit, students must earn at least a C in a course, except for a limited number of pass-fail courses. While completing those requirements, many students also earn an associate's degree. All community colleges offer transfer courses, though each college requires a somewhat different set of classes.

Is there any way to guarantee I'll be admitted to the university of my choice?

Each UC and CSU campus has transfer agreements with some community colleges. These "transfer guarantee" programs assure students who fulfill the requirements a place at that university, but not necessarily in a specific major. Find out which community colleges have such agreements with your preferred university by going to the college or university websites or by talking with your community college counselor.

Beginning with the 2006–07 school year, CSU and community colleges are streamlining their process for students interested in 30 popular majors—ranging from art to biology to mechanical engineering to nursing. The set of required courses for each major will be standardized. If you complete the set, you will have met the requirements for that major at any CSU campus. (Currently each CSU campus can have its own requirements, and the required courses often have different numbers depending on which college you attend.)

In addition, if you commit to attending a particular CSU campus,

you will be guaranteed a spot in your chosen major if you complete the set of courses. If you are interested, speak to the transfer center or counseling office at your community college. Counselors will have the list of 30 majors, and that list is expected to grow. (Some UC campuses may also decide to join this program.)

What if I don't know which university I want to attend?

To satisfy the lower-division GE requirements at all UC and CSU campuses, you can take a series of courses called the Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum (IGETC—pronounced “I get C”). Each community college has different courses that meet the IGETC requirement. If students complete those courses at their community college, then they know they have met the GE requirements for at least some of the majors at all state universities.

For some students, however, IGETC is not the right approach. Some majors—particularly those in engineering and the sciences—require more or different GE requirements than the IGETC courses. If you know which major you want to pursue, check the list of required courses in your major's department at the university you plan to attend. Many departments also expect transfer students to have completed introductory courses in their future field of study.

IGETC requires completion of a minimum of 37 semester units of lower-division work with a C grade or better in each course. C- is not allowed. In addition to the above requirements, you must also have proof of proficiency in a foreign language by:

- Passing an exam in the language;
- Taking two semesters of the same foreign language at a community college;
- Or, for some majors at some universities, providing a transcript showing that you took three years of the same foreign language in high school, earning at least a C average the last year. Some majors and colleges within the universities require specific foreign languages or more foreign language credits.

What if I want to attend a CSU campus but am not sure which one?

If you know you are going to attend a CSU campus, you can take a set of courses called GE-Breadth units instead of the IGETC courses or the required courses for a specific CSU campus. GE-Breadth requires a minimum of 37–39 semester units of lower-division courses. Students who complete this set of courses have fulfilled all lower-division GE requirements at any CSU campus. No proof of proficiency in a foreign language is required.

If students plan carefully, they can take the same courses to satisfy the IGETC, GE-Breadth, and the associate degree requirements. Generally the IGETC list of courses is smaller than the ones allowed under GE-Breadth or for an associate's degree. So if you are choosing

courses to meet GE requirements, start with the IGETC course list.

It is always important to plan your schedule with the help of a community college counselor or transfer center. It is even more important to do so if you are not sure which university you want to attend and/or what major you want to pursue. Well-meaning advice from friends, teachers, or others could cost you time and money.

If I complete a community college's transfer program, must I do anything else to be accepted by the state university of my choice?

Some universities demand a specific GPA or other requirements from transfer students. If the university or major you have chosen is particularly popular, the requirements are likely to be tougher. Go to the university's website and also speak to your community college counselor.

Where can I find out more?

Talk to your high school and community college counselors. Look for notices of open houses or informational meetings sponsored by the community colleges in your area. Find your local community college on the Internet. For further information, see the following websites:

- California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office: www.cccco.edu
- A website where you can apply for financial aid for community college: www.icanaffordcollege.com
- University of California Office of the President: www.ucop.edu and www.ucop.edu/pathways
- California State University system: www.calstate.edu and www.csumentor.edu

In addition, you can download for free three student/parent guides published by EdSource: *A Guide to California's Community Colleges*, *A Guide to CSU Admissions Policies*, and *A Guide to UC Admissions Policies*. For these reports, go to www.edsource.org and click on Publications in the yellow bar.

Are you ready for college?

- ✓ Are you taking college-prep courses?
- ✓ Are you planning to take English and math classes your senior year?
- ✓ Have you talked with your high school counselor or administrator about college?
- ✓ Have you looked for notices of open houses or informational meetings sponsored by local community colleges or gone online to see what they have to offer?
- ✓ Have you visited your local community colleges and made an appointment to see a counselor?
- ✓ If you need financial help, have you talked to the financial aid office at your local community college and visited online www.icanaffordcollege.com?



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EdSource thanks the Stuart Foundation for its investment in our work.

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