

# Three Surprising Reasons to Attend Community College First



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Here's why students should seriously consider spending the first two years of their undergraduate career in community college.

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Community colleges are rarely perceived as having the same level of prestige as many four-year universities. Unfortunately, that can lead eager new students to pass them up despite their many benefits.

What are those benefits, exactly? Few people would be shocked to hear community colleges are less expensive than four-year universities. But you might be surprised at how much a student can really save.

The advantages don't end there. Money is only part of the picture. Read on to find out why students should seriously consider spending the first two years of their undergraduate career in community college.

## 1. Average Savings of \$11,377

The question of whether [college is worth it](#) is a big one these days. Considering that the average 2016 grad who took out loans for school walked away with \$37,172 in debt, some young adults might be unsure whether they should attend college at all. (You can [read more about the dangers of certain student loans here](#).)

However, the amount a student has to spend (or borrow) to complete a four-year degree is slashed when the first two years are completed at a community college.

A recent Student Loan Hero study on the [cost of a college credit](#) found that, on average, a college credit from a community college is 60% cheaper than one at a four-year public university. This translates to an average savings of \$11,377 for a student who earns their first 60 credits at a two-year public school before transferring to an in-state public university. (If this sounds like your plan, be sure to [read this guide to federal student loans](#).)

## 2. Make Up for Mediocre Grades

Not all teens have the ability or the attitude to do well in high school. Because academic success is largely determined by grades, students who earn poor grades have little chance of getting into a decent college.

There aren't any do-overs — that is, unless they enroll in community college. "I was a smart kid, but I hated high school, so I didn't do well. As I look back, I also wasn't mature enough at the time to have succeeded at a four-year school," said Roberto Santiago, a community college professor at Ohlone College in Fremont, California.

"Going to community college allowed me to grow into growing up," Santiago said. "I became an 'A' student, was on the Dean's List and eventually graduated cum laude. I also started to enjoy school. I enjoyed it so much I'm now writing my dissertation and expect to have a Ph.D. within a year."

Not every high school graduate is ready to take on the demands of a four-year university. Some students need additional support in certain subjects. Others require more time to grow up. Community college allows fresh high school grads to work toward earning their degrees while providing some breathing room during the transition.

### **3. Flexibility**

It's not a stretch to assume that the typical 18-year-old doesn't exactly have their life figured out. Even if they do, the plan is likely to change several times. Unfortunately, many four-year programs require students to enroll full time, even if they haven't chosen a major.

Not all students are prepared to hit the ground running when it comes to pursuing their degrees. Alissa Carpenter, a career discovery and personal development coach who owns the business Everything's Not OK and That's OK, explained that it can be a "hard pill to swallow" if a student isn't sure what they want to do and has to spend thousands of dollars to figure it out.

"Community colleges give you the opportunity to take courses at your own pace," Carpenter said. "This affords the student flexibility to have a job, decrease course loads and explore potential majors without the pressure and potential financial burden."

Santiago echoed this sentiment. "The flexible schedule allowed me to work full time and attend school around my work schedule. I was also able to take a reduced course load with no penalties," he said. "Without that flexibility, I would never have been able to succeed."

There are a lot of good reasons to start off at a community college, regardless of a student's situation. Even those who aced their Advanced Placement courses and have clear visions for their careers can stand to reap the financial benefits. By saving money in the first two years, students can accumulate less debt, pay off student loans faster and live their lives with less of a financial burden.

"I believe strongly in the community college mission," said Santiago. "There are a lot of smart kids who, like me, had poor grades, or a poor attitude, or don't have the money for a four-year school right after high school. Community college allows these kids to start exploring college at whatever pace they can manage. It can take more time, but it can be a boon for a great many students."