

Challenges Facing California Community Colleges

• DECEMBER 14

[HTTPS://SIGNALSCV.COM/2021/12/5-CHALLENGES-FACING-CALIFORNIAS-COMMUNITY-COLLEGES/](https://signalscv.com/2021/12/5-challenges-facing-californias-community-colleges/)

Community colleges have an open admission policy, low tuition and fees, and flexible class schedules. They cater to students who want to obtain certificates or associate degrees in their fields, and those who may decide to transfer to four-year colleges or universities.

With 116 community colleges, California has the largest higher education system in the country. But they are faced with challenges that continue to hinder the growth and development of these institutions. Here are some of the issues affecting California's community colleges.

1. Low pass rates

About 70% of community college students in California fail to obtain a degree or transfer to a four-year institution. Many students leave community colleges when they can no longer afford the tuition, faculty fees, and living costs.

Some may refuse to complete their education due to poor college readiness and language or communication barriers. They may find the school to be stressful or lose interest in their major and coursework. While others drop out to work full-time or take on more jobs.

2. Lack of diversity in faculty staff

California's community colleges serve a diverse student body of roughly 1.8 million students. But there's a lack of diversity in faculty staff. And it's quite challenging to have students from various backgrounds without an equally diverse higher education administration and faculty.

Unfortunately, the funding system for community colleges in California isn't reliable. There aren't enough funds to employ full-time educators in all districts across the state. California is yet to implement a good strategy for diversifying its teaching ranks.

3. Failure to pivot to meet the changing needs of students.

Almost every sector in the nation has improved and adapted more dynamic ways of doing things. But the higher education system holds on to old structures and systems that have become outdated. Many students need help with enrollment, **financial aid**, and other processes.

The ability to keep up with emerging technologies is another challenge facing California's community colleges. Students want to complete their education via online classes but only **a few community colleges can do so**.

4. Low enrolment rates during the COVID-19 pandemic.

California's community colleges saw **a decline in student enrollment from 2020 to 2021**. During the coronavirus pandemic, several colleges shut their doors to obey lockdown rules. But this resulted in students losing interest in college education.

Low enrollment rates pose a potential future threat to each of these institutions and represent a huge challenge for the overall system. However, most students chose not to enroll during the pandemic because they couldn't take classes online.

5. Underfunding

Community colleges, on average, receive \$8,800 less in funding per student than four-year institutions. There's **a total revenue gap of \$78 billion** between these two sectors. This is mostly because four-year institutions collect higher tuition fees and they also receive larger state funding.

However, community colleges have to solicit other funding sources in order to provide excellent higher education, counseling services, emergency aid, and others. Grants and scholarships help to provide additional revenue to these colleges.

What can be done to turn this around?

Community college completion rates have been an issue of concern since these two-year schools became a vital part of the higher education system in the U.S. The challenges facing California's community colleges can be resolved by implementing the right ideas and strategies. Check out the suggestions below:

- **Employ more qualified higher education leaders**
Community colleges are being embraced as a cost-effective option for several students. But leadership at these schools seems to be ineffective. A strong leadership team would approach problems more strategically and improve the community college system.

Since a large percentage of community college presidents are set to retire in the next five years, California's community colleges should prepare to employ more qualified leaders, preferably those who have a masters in higher education administration.

- Lobby government and the private sector

Since state appropriations are not enough for community colleges in California, they have to look to other sources such as tuition and fees, sales and services, grants and contracts, and local debt-services payments for additional revenue.

To secure more funding and resources from the government, these institutions could lobby at conferences and public meetings. The higher education system is often forgotten during these conversations so community colleges have to raise their voices.

- Implement diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs

The Faculty Association of California's Community Colleges embraces the call for the elimination of racism in the higher education system. They have agreed to ensure equity, diversity, and inclusion throughout the State's community colleges.

Leaders in community colleges should implement DEI programs to provide an equal educational opportunity for all students. They should recruit more diverse faculties, assess college policies and support services, and provide diversity and cultural awareness to faculty, staff, and students.

- Increase collaboration between colleges

The nation's largest higher education system faces several challenges. It only makes sense for colleges to collaborate and offer a wider range of courses, services, and support structures. Collaboration would help provide structural support so students can be better served.

Community Colleges can also partner with public and private four-year institutions to ensure that students have access to bachelor's degree programs. They would collaborate with universities to increase student-transfer success rates and facilitate the entire process.