

The California Community College System

The California Community College system is the largest system of higher education in the world, with 115 colleges organized into 73 districts, serving over 2.1 million students.

By design, California's community college districts incorporate all of the state's territory. Virtually all Californians are within commuting distance of a community college. Districts vary in enrollment from the Lake Tahoe Community College District with 1,500 full-time equivalent students to the Los Angeles Community College District with 92,199 students.

The colleges are publicly supported and locally oriented institutions that offer associate degrees, transfer education, and workforce development programs. They are part of California's three-tiered, public postsecondary educational system – the California Community Colleges, California State University, and University of California.

Governance

Each of the 73 community college districts in the state has a locally-elected board of trustees, responsive to local community needs and charged with the policy leadership for the district. Boards range in size from five to seven members who are elected by the local community either on a district-wide or area basis. Boards also have student members who are elected by the students. The role and responsibilities of local boards are described in other chapters of the *Trustee Handbook*.

The statewide California Community Colleges system is governed by a Board of Governors (BOG), which was created in 1967 to oversee the colleges comprising the system. The 17-member Board establishes policy and regulations, interacts with the Legislature and federal and state organizations, and selects the Chancellor for the system. Board members are appointed by the governor. Two seats on the Board are designated for trustees, two for community college faculty, one for classified staff and two for students. The Board of Governors is directed to maintain and continue, to the maximum degree permissible, local autonomy and control in the administration of the community colleges.

The Chancellor consults with the colleges through a formal system. The Consultation Council includes representatives from the chief executive officers, faculty members, chief instructional officers, chief student services officers, chief business officers, chief human resources officers, trustees, students, and the Community College League of California (the League). The board of the California Community College Trustees (part of the League) meets periodically with the Board of Governors to discuss topics of mutual concern.

The System Office is the administrative branch of the California Community Colleges System. The System Office implements Board of Governors' regulations and other legislation, allocates state funding, oversees the conduct of the colleges, and provides leadership for the system.

Students and Employees

Over 2.1 million students are served by the community colleges each year. Students come from all walks of life and all educational backgrounds. Their average age is about 27. Sixty percent of the students attend on a part-time basis.

Approximate percentages of ethnic and gender groups are:

Students	Percent CCCs (2018-19)
Male	44.9
Female	53.83
African American	5.9
Asian	11.56
Filipino	2.69
Pacific Islander	0.41
Hispanic	44.54
Native American	0.43
White Non-Hispanic	25.88
Multi-Ethnic	3.82
Unknown/Non-Respond.	4.78

The community colleges employ over 85,000 people, including 18,000 full-time faculty, 26,000 support staff, and 2,000 administrators. In addition, the colleges employ 39,000 part-time faculty.

History

Community colleges are an American invention. The first institution of higher education in America, Harvard University, was established in 1636. The first junior college was founded in 1901 in Joliet, Illinois. A major impetus for the creation of junior colleges was a proposal by William Rainey Harper, then president of the University of Chicago, to shift the first two years of a university education to junior colleges.

The first community colleges in the United States were often private institutions. But by 1947, the number of public community colleges exceeded the number of private ones. The numbers of community colleges increased greatly in the 1940's and 1950's as our nation placed increased emphasis on post-high school education. Enrollment pressure in the 1960's created another boom of expansion and construction that continued through the late 1970's.

In California, the Legislature authorized junior college courses in 1907 as an extension of the public school system. Fresno was the first community to offer a post-high school course of study for students wishing to pursue a baccalaureate degree. In 1921, junior college districts were authorized to be separate from public school districts. A significant number of colleges were founded in the 1950's in response to the growing demand for higher education. The Legislature then began the study leading to the 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education, which still provides the blueprint for community colleges and universities.

In 1967, a review of the first Master Plan resulted in the Stiern Act, which created the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges and removed the college districts from oversight by the Department of Education. Local college districts maintained autonomous responsibility for curricula, facilities, personnel, budget, and local tax rates. During the late sixties and early seventies, the colleges expanded their offerings to today's broader community mission, and the name junior college was generally dropped in favor of community college.

Although the Master Plan originally recommended high proportions of state funding for colleges, they received the majority of their funds from local property taxes, and tax rates were established by local boards. However, Proposition 13, passed in 1978, resulted in a 60 percent reduction in property tax revenues and the loss of the board's ability to establish local tax rates. The state Legislature and System Office took on a greater role in financing and regulating the work of the colleges.

In 1988, landmark legislation (AB 1725) provided new direction and support for California's public community colleges. The legislation clarified and validated the mission of the community colleges, delegated specific authority to Academic Senates, and mandated an accountability system. It also established a system for minimum qualifications for faculty hire, established goals related to staff diversity and full-time and part-time faculty ratios, created special funds for faculty and staff development and diversity, and addressed a number of other issues.

The decade of the 1990's saw a maturing of the community college mission and a political recognition of the important contributions the colleges make to the economic and social health of their communities. Proposition 98 passed and set a minimum guarantee of the state budget for K-12 and community colleges. The first decade of the 21st century brought consistent state support, along with increases in student fees.

California's 112 community colleges celebrated their centennial anniversary in 2010. The first large-scale community college system in the country continues to be the nation's leader in adult participation.

In recent years, California has fallen in rankings and now lags behind many other states in the production of college graduates. In 2006, California ranked 23rd among states in its share of 25- to 34- year olds holding at least a bachelor's degree, down from eighth position in 1960.

National attention to this issue culminated in a proposal by President Barack Obama to reclaim the lead in adults earning associate's degrees among nations in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. As a strategy within this effort, entitled the "American Graduation Initiative," President Obama calls upon community colleges to increase degree and certificate completions by 5 million by 2020 as a component of the larger higher education attainment goal. In 2010, the Community College League of California convened its "Commission on the Future (COTF)," comprised of 33 college leaders to identify policy and practice changes to increase meaningful completions in California Community Colleges by 2020.

In January 2011, pursuant to SB 1143 (Ch. 409, Statutes of 2010), the California Community Colleges Board of Governors created a Student Success Task Force to identify best practices for student success. The task force report issued 22 recommendations, including several based on the League's COTF Report, which led to passage of the Seymour-Campbell Student Success Act of 2012, SB 1456, (Ch.624, Statutes of 2012). Among other issues, this measure revises and recasts the matriculation program with the express purpose of increasing college access and success by providing effective core matriculation services of orientation, assessment and placement, counseling and other education planning services, and academic interventions. The complete task force report can be accessed by the Student Success Initiative link at www.cccco.edu.

In 2014, the Governor and Legislature authorized an eight-year pilot program allowing up to 15 colleges to offer one applied baccalaureate degree each that is not offered by, or duplicative of, UC or CSU degrees.

Mission and Programs

Community colleges are committed to three major values in fulfilling their mission: access, equity, and success. They provide access to higher education for all – everyone who can benefit from education may attend a community college. Equity refers to the effort to ensure that people from all ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds have the skills and knowledge to benefit from and succeed in the colleges – to close the "achievement gap" between students from different demographic groups. Success refers to the commitment to provide the programs and services needed to ensure that students are able to achieve their educational goals.

To further these values, California Education Code (§66010.4) establishes the following mission and functions for the community colleges:

- As a primary mission, academic and vocational instruction at the lower division level for younger and older students.
- As a primary mission, advance California's economic growth and global competitiveness through education, training and services that contribute to workforce improvement.
- As essential and important functions, remedial instruction, and in conjunction with school districts, adult noncredit education, English as a Second Language, and support services that help students succeed.
- As authorized functions, community service courses and programs and institutional research concerning student learning and retention.

The colleges offer a wide variety of programs in the liberal arts and sciences and in over 400 occupational specialties. Most classes are small (the average size is 33) resulting in personalized learning environments.

Counseling and other student service programs, including matriculation services, career and transfer planning, disabled student services, financial aid, health services, re-entry programs, child care, and programs for educationally and economically disadvantaged students are designed to ensure student success at the college level.

Many colleges have built strong partnerships with business and industry and provide contract education courses, small business assistance programs, and other educational services to the economic community. The CCC Economic and Workforce Development Program (www.cccedw.net) is a statewide resource system and training institute working with the colleges and business community to provide continuous workforce improvement, technology enhancement, and business development.

Access and Fees

Community colleges have a unique, historical responsibility to provide open admission without regard to race, ethnic or national origin, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, or prior educational status or any other basis for discrimination. The emphasis on access to the community colleges is one of the most basic educational values in California and is a major reason that fees have remained low over the years.

Community college enrollment in California is by law open to any person with a high school diploma or any person 18 or over who can benefit from instruction. The law also permits concurrent enrollment of high school and younger students according to agreements between college and school districts.

Many California community colleges established a number of student fees for specific services during the 1960's and 1970's. In 1984, the Legislature established a \$5 per unit fee for enrollment in credit classes for California residents (out-of-state students pay more). In 1993, the Legislature increased the fees to \$13 per unit and limited the ability of colleges to charge other fees. Since then, the Legislature has raised and lowered fees every few years; they were \$26 per unit in 2009-2010 and \$46 per unit as of Summer 2012.

Other Systems and Agencies

California State University (CSU)

The California State University consists of 23 campuses serving over 481,210 students. About 51 percent of CSU graduates have transferred from community colleges. In the Master Plan for Higher Education, the CSU is authorized to grant baccalaureate and master's degrees as well as teaching credentials. It admits the top one-third of high school graduates. Community college transfers have priority for admission. The CSU is governed by a Board of Trustees appointed by the Governor.

University of California (UC)

The University of California consists of 10 general campuses and a medical campus, plus a number of professional schools. Undergraduate enrollment at the University is over 216,747, and there are approximately 56,275 graduate and professional students. The University is authorized to grant baccalaureate, masters, doctoral, and professional degrees and credentials. It is constitutionally separate from the Legislature and is governed by an appointed Board of Regents. About 29 percent of UC graduates transferred from community colleges. In the Master Plan, the University has primary responsibility for research and graduate education.

Private Institutions of Higher Education

There are approximately 110 private, accredited colleges and universities in California, over 70 of which are represented at the state level by the Association of California Independent Colleges and Universities.

Public Schools

There are over 1,000 school districts in California attended by more than 6.2 million children. Since many community colleges were created by the public school districts, the systems have a number of connections and similarities. Both have districts governed by locally-elected boards and are subject to the funding provisions of Proposition 98. State-authorized adult education programs may be offered either by a public school district or a community college.

Future

There will continue to be an increasing demand for higher education from a growing and increasingly diverse population. However, the state may not be able to provide major increases in state funding. Therefore, community colleges face continuing challenges to deliver high quality educational programs.

Many governmental, educational, and business groups continue to study the role and mission of the community colleges as well as other segments of higher education. Questions about governance, structure, educational delivery systems, relations with business, funding, fees, and mission priorities will continue to be discussed throughout the coming years and beyond.