

Five Myths about Community Colleges

By Jennifer LeClaire

Like most misconceptions, community college myths are based on elements of truth. But like most misconceptions, these myths lead to mistaken beliefs that could warp your ability to choose the right post-high school educational path.

"There are many wrong assumptions about community colleges, but the top students at community colleges are among our country's greatest assets," says Joshua Wyner, vice president of programs with the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation, an organization that focuses on community college student development.

Indeed, Walt Disney went to a community college. So did renowned corporate executive H. Ross Perot, transplant surgeon Daniel Hayes and NASA astronaut Eileen Collins. Nobel and Pulitzer Prize winners and several governors also graduated from junior colleges. In the spring of 2006, William D. Green, CEO of Accenture, wrote a column in *Newsweek* about how his time at Dean College, a two-year college near Boston, helped shape his career.

Nationally, 40 percent of all traditional-age college students start out at community college, according to the U.S. Department of Education. So let's bust five of the most common myths about community colleges and let the truth speak for itself.

Myth 1: Students only attend community college because they can't get in to a four-year university.

Fact: Statistics deny this assumption. It may be true that, on average, community college students have lower SAT and ACT scores than university students, but many students attend community college for convenience, family, job or financial considerations.

"Community college makes sense, purely for economic reasons. We expect more students to use community colleges in the future because of the sheer cost of a university education," Wyner explains. Community college students save on tuition and also on boarding because they can live at home during the first two years of school.

Myth 2: A degree from a community college is not as good as a university degree.

Fact: A community college degree can take you straight into the workforce or to an elite four-year university. Community colleges educate 62 percent of allied health professionals and over 80 percent of law enforcement officers and firefighters, according to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC).

"Community colleges are not inferior. It is the first choice for many students because the first two years of college are really exploratory anyway and it costs so much less," says Victor Somma, a spokesperson for Quinsigamond Community College in Worcester, Mass.

Myth 3: Community colleges are inexpensive, so the education is not high quality.

Fact: Community colleges may be less expensive than four-year universities, but that doesn't mean you sacrifice a quality education. Classes in honors programs at community colleges are smaller than university classes. The curriculum is often more in-depth and there is more open exchange between teachers and students.

"We are a brand name society. Community colleges tend to be the generic brand, but it's just as good a foundation as starting at a four-year university at half the price," says AACC Spokeswoman Norma Kent. "Community college graduates have gone on to Ivy League schools."

Myth 4: Community college credits do not transfer to four-year universities

Fact: The quality of community colleges is getting better all the time. There are more articulation agreements that are seeing four-year colleges agreeing to award credit for comparable courses taken at community colleges.

"You need to know what institution you want to attend, pay attention to their requirements, and choose your classes accordingly," Kent asserts. "The key is careful planning."

Myth 5: Community colleges have low academic standards.

Fact: While community colleges offer "open admission" that breeds diversity, all courses are not open admission. In fact, students usually have to take placement tests in order to qualify for college level work. Technical and special programs have high standards and students compete to enroll.

"The idea that students go to community colleges because they can't hack it at a four-year university is ridiculous," Somma says. "We have stringent policies, but we also offer students the extra support they need to succeed."