



7 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT COMMUNITY AND TECHNICAL COLLEGES

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1. Creating Economic Mobility

Washington's 34 community and technical colleges serve people of all ages and backgrounds right in their local communities, providing the education and training that leads to well-paying jobs, career mobility and university study. Whether students are 16 or 60, urban or rural, just out of high school or working adults, our colleges prepare them for the next step up in life.

2. Many Roads to Success

According to the Washington Roundtable, employers will create 373,000 new net jobs in Washington state by 2026. Seventy percent of the jobs are expected to require education beyond high school.¹ Our colleges prepare Washington students to fill those jobs. Students can choose from a variety of options that fit them best — whether they want an industry certificate, a degree, training in the skilled trades or to transfer to a university — and our colleges will support them along the way.

3. The State's Largest System of Higher Education

Last year (2022-23 school year), about 273,000 students enrolled in a Washington community or technical college, making our system of 34 colleges the largest system of public higher education in Washington.² More than eight in 10 Washingtonians have some connection with community and technical colleges, either because they themselves or a family member attended classes.³

Our students tend to remain in their local regions, contributing to the economy and building the future of the communities in which they live.

4. A Diverse Student Body

Community and technical colleges are proud to be the most inclusive and diverse higher education institutions in the nation. Here in Washington state, 51% of our students are students of color.

Our students are more likely to come from lower-income families, to be people of color, and to work or raise children while in college. Many are the first in their families to attend college. The median age is 26.⁴

We serve students for whom a college credential can make the biggest change in the trajectory of their lives and who represent the fastest growing populations in our state. Our students also face some of the biggest barriers to college.

5. Accessible and Affordable

Community and technical colleges meet people where they are in life and put them on the path to a brighter future; nobody is turned away. With a tuition of \$4,623 per year for a full-time student, our colleges are a considerably less expensive option. We are accessible, affordable, and connected to K-12 schools, universities and employers.



6. Three Mission Areas

Washington's community and technical college system is focused on three mission areas.

Workforce education

Our colleges train students for in-demand jobs that employers are looking to fill. Programs in fields like dental hygiene, cybersecurity, and advanced manufacturing move people into good jobs and help us compete in the global economy. Seven percent of students in our workforce programs already have a bachelor's degree or higher.⁵

University transfer

Washington state has one of the strongest transfer agreements in the country thanks to a close partnership between the community and technical college system and four-year colleges and universities.

Community and technical college students make up nearly 40% of the students who graduate with bachelor's degrees from public universities. Students who transfer from two-year colleges to four-year universities do just as well as those who started as freshmen, with similar GPAs and credits earned.⁶

Basic Education for Adults

Our colleges provide adult basic education, high school completion programs, and precollege (formerly known as "remedial") education, providing that first, most important stepping stone to job training, certificates, and degrees.

Basic Education for Adults students come to our colleges to learn foundational skills — like reading, writing and math — so they can move into college-level classes and careers. Students are also taught "soft skills" that are valued by employers. Other students enroll to learn English, complete their high school diplomas, or take the GED.[®]

7. Academic Excellence

Awarded by the prestigious Aspen Institute, the Aspen Prize is the nation's signature recognition of community and technical colleges that are achieving high, improving, and equitable outcomes for students. The award involves a rigorous two-year process that assesses student outcomes at more than 1,000 U.S. community and technical colleges, leading to the selection of 10 finalists and, ultimately, one winner.

Throughout the process, the Aspen Institute and its higher education experts analyze a range of quantitative data, evaluate detailed applications from colleges, and interview a wide variety of college stakeholders.

The award — once described by former president Barack Obama as "the Oscars for great community colleges" — started in 2011 and takes place every two years. One or more of Washington's community and technical colleges have been named finalists or winners in six of the seven award cycles. South Puget Sound Community College was a finalist for the 2023 award, and six were named among the top 150 colleges in the nation for the 2025 award.⁷

1. Postsecondary Enrollment in Washington: The Crisis Intensifies, by Washington Roundtable, January 2022
2. SBCTC enrollment dashboard for 2022-23 academic year.
3. WA Community and Technical College Survey Results by EMC Research, August 2018
4. SBCTC enrollment dashboard for 2022-23 academic year.
5. SBCTC enrollment dashboard for the 2022-23 academic year. Data sorted with "other" prior education category excluded.
6. 39%: The Role of Transfer in the Attainment of Baccalaureate Degrees at Washington's Public Bachelor's Degree Institutions, class of 2016, May 4, 2018.
7. Aspen Institute website: <https://highered.aspeninstitute.org/aspen-prize-winners-and-finalists/>