

SMART PEOPLE make the move to a 2 year college



If you want a challenging educational experience, try a two-year college. Okay, so nobody claims two-year schools enjoy the reputations of big-name universities. After all, most community, junior and technical colleges operate under open admission policies, meaning anyone who may benefit can attend. But don't confuse open access with a lack of quality.

"Community college is definitely for smart people," says Joey Vogel, a student at Canada College in California. "I had a great GPA in high school, but after careful consideration, I chose a two-year college. I wanted to be able to take classes I thought I might like, and experiment with different kinds of classes. Community college really does give me that kind of freedom."

In recent years, more and more high-achieving high school students have chosen this option. They've found while two-year colleges are much less costly than four-year schools, they also provide an excellent quality educational experience.



TOP-NOTCH TEACHING

With dedicated faculty who focus on teaching rather than research, two-year schools offer some of the most dynamic instructors around. In fact, it's not unusual for students who have gone on to bachelor degree programs to cite the faculty at their community college as among the best they ever had.

"Smart students are well suited to the atmosphere of a two-year college," says Michael Logsdon, a professor of physics at Garrett College in McHenry, Maryland. He points out two-year schools offer the same kinds of courses universities offer during the freshman and sophomore years.

"Being able to exercise one's abilities to the fullest in these first two years of college with smaller size classes and more accessible instructors, further insures smart students will continue to hold an edge among their peers," he says.

TICKET TO TRANSFER

A growing trend among talented students is starting at a two-year college and then transferring to a four-year college or university. And often that transfer does not need to take you far. Many two-year colleges have articulation agreements with four-year universities and the actual courses for the bachelor or master degree is taught on the two-year college

campus — Broome Community College, NY, Olympic College, WA, Alpena Community College, MI, and Shawnee Community College, IL, are examples.

"I have seen a significant increase in high-achieving high school students pursuing the transfer process," says Sonja Montiel, CEO of College Confidence, in Westlake Village, California. "Because of their discipline in academics, they are more likely to succeed in the transfer process and follow through on their educational goals."

Many students are finding — even if you find name value important — you can have it both ways by following the transfer path. Not only can you earn precious college credits at a fraction of the cost of four-year institutions, once you transfer and earn a bachelor degree, it will carry the name of the baccalaureate school, with no difference in status than for those who started there as freshmen. It's like buying a new sports car from a relative who gives you a thirty percent discount; the fact the car costs less has nothing to do with its value as far as the rest of the world is concerned.

Another plus is that doing well at a two-year college can provide your ticket to admission to competitive four-year schools. "For many four-year colleges and universities, transferring into their institution is much less competitive compared to being admitted straight from high school," says Ms. Montiel.

In fact, many four-year schools have policies in place dictating they accept a specified number of grads from two-year colleges, or giving preferred status to students who have completed a given associate degree program. For some students, this can greatly enhance the chance of gaining admission to a given four-year college.

Too, the prospect of combining career preparation with long-range academic plans appeals to many students. "At a two-year college you have the option to transfer your credits to a four-year college and continue your educational journey

towards a bachelor degree and even on to a master degree if you truly enjoy the career you have chosen," says Michelle Rush, a New York two-year college student.

When Rush finished high school, she wasn't sure what she wanted to do. But once she started taking paralegal classes at her college, she became excited by the option to gain career skills while also opening up new doors.

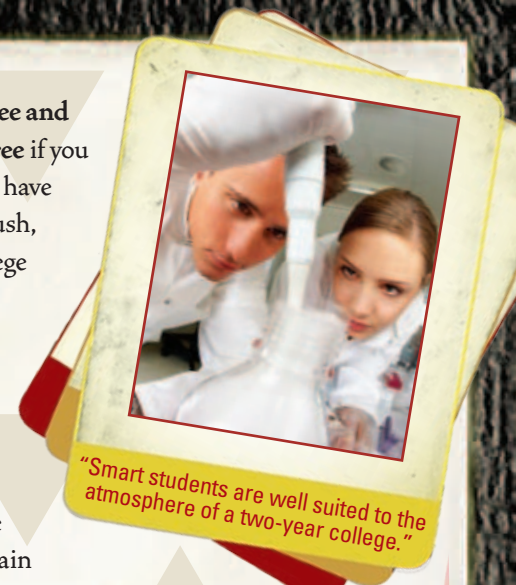
"I plan on taking what I have learned and go out into the work world as a paralegal," she says. "I also plan to transfer my credits to go on to pre-law and even law school, because I know now that I do have the ability to achieve success."

SOLID SAVINGS

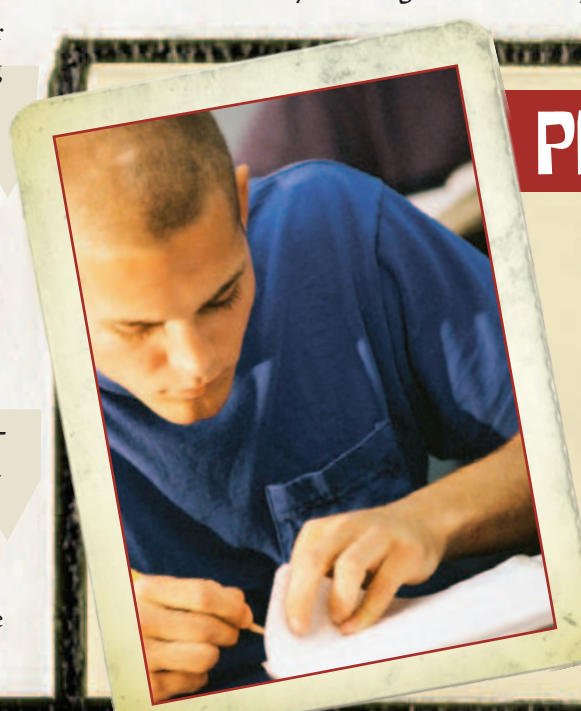
When it comes to money, you'll find a two-year college can really be a smart choice. While tuition rates vary around the country, two-year colleges charge a fraction of the tuition and fees of four-year schools.

And anyway you do the math, the figures look good. If you plan to transfer, you can save big bucks for the first couple of years, and then be better prepared to handle the higher tuition rates when you encounter them.

Or if you're interested in an occupational degree or certificate, you can enjoy low tuition throughout your studies. Too, lower costs make it less of a risk in experimenting with new courses or programs. You can take those courses you are interested in just for the fun of learning.



"Smart students are well suited to the atmosphere of a two-year college."



PHI THETA KAPPA THE HONOR SOCIETY FOR TWO-YEAR COLLEGES

For high-achieving students, a great opportunity is provided by Phi Theta Kappa (PTK), an honor society for two-year colleges.

"Most people think this is just a club people join when in fact it is much more," says PTK member Kim von Hagn, a recent graduate of Corning Community College, a unit of the State University of New York. "It is an international honor society very involved in the community, both locally and across the world."

Kim says students in PTK are offered more than \$36 million in transfer scholarships. "These scholarships can range from a waived application fee to a full ride to finish a bachelor degree at a four-year school," she says.

A bonus with membership is the chance to get involved in community activities, according to von Hagn. At her college, students have participated in activities to support Relay for Life, Habitat for Humanity, the Great American Smoke Out, and "Camp Good Days and Happy Times," a camp for children with serious illnesses.

"Our chapter also sends students to the International Convention and the Honors Institutes held once a year," she says.

To join Phi Theta Kappa, students must have completed 12 or more college credits and hold a 3.5 or greater GPA on a 4.0 scale. PTK members often earn a reputation as the best students on their campuses.

MOVING ON...

A two-year college education is a passport to prestigious universities.

Here are three of Miami Dade College's 2006 graduates moving on (L-R):

- ▶ **NATHALIE ALEGRE**
transferring to Yale University
- ▶ **BURR FONG**
transferring to Amherst University
- ▶ **ROBERT FORD**
transferring to Howard University



Honors Programs provide academic and social interaction between highly motivated students.

"The inexpensive classes are a superb value," says Vogel, "and the low cost also gives you the opportunity to take any class that is interesting."

Vogel recently enrolled in a class in Flash Animation, a course that is not required in his program.

"Now halfway through the semester I have a good foundation in this subject, and I can decide if I'd like to continue taking Flash classes," he says. "If I end up deciding this is not a course I like, then I don't feel so bad that I've spent seventy-eight dollars on the class. Just compare that with the hundreds of dollars per unit I'd be spending at a private art school."

Of course the choice of a college is a very personal one, and it involves more than economics. But the ranks of two-year college boosters certainly seem to be growing. For bright students across the country, the two-year college has much to offer.

"The truth is community colleges are wonderful places that require hard work and determination," Vogel says. "You can start there with great instructors, small size classes at a great savings — then transfer. It just makes sense."

HONORS PROGRAMS

More two-year colleges are offering the opportunity to participate in honors programs. These special programs add extra appeal to talented students both in selecting a college in the first place, and in making the most of the college experience once enrolled.

The features offered by honors programs vary from one college to another. They may include special

courses designed to be more challenging, scholarships and more.

At Miami Dade College in Florida, talented students may participate in the school's Honors College. Through what the college calls a linked learning community format, students work closely with professors in pursuing academic goals. The program features small classes focusing on interaction with faculty, challenging course work, early registration and special scholarship opportunities. To participate, students apply for acceptance based on grades, test scores, recommendations, an essay, and a personal interview.

Likewise, the Honors Program at Harford Community College in Maryland offers small classes limited to 15 students allowing for personalized instruction and interaction between outstanding teachers and students. In these classes, students have the opportunity to read more broadly, share their perspectives and participate in research and special projects.

Along with benefits like a dedicated Honors study area and exciting and novel learning experiences, students in the Honors Program at California's Moorpark College may qualify for priority admissions or extra scholarships at four-year colleges and universities. They also participate in honors receptions, special lectures, cultural events, tours of universities, and awards ceremonies.

You can find out more about any college's honors program through the school's admissions office. Or simply consult catalogs or websites. Not all two-year colleges offer honors programs. But if one is available at a school in which you're interested, be sure to check it out. **M**

"Knowledge is the key that unlocks all the doors. It doesn't matter what you look like or where you come from if you have knowledge."

— Dr. Benjamin Carson, world-famous African-American brain surgeon

CHECK IT OUT UNIQUE PROGRAMS AT TWO-YEAR COLLEGES

One of the best features of two-year colleges is the variety of programs they offer. You can find an array of programs that lead to unusual careers or simply address your personal interests. From race car management or boat building to grape production and wine-making, two-year colleges have much to offer.

"There is such a diversity of opportunity," says Ms. Montiel of College Confidence. "You can be involved with programs that focus on career development such as culinary programs, certificate programs in medicine and dentistry, and even animal training," she says. "Or you can be moving forward in the transfer process."

A great example is the Adventure Sports Program at Garrett College in Maryland. The first of its type to be offered in the United States, this ground-breaking program offers students the chance to pursue activities such as whitewater rafting, rock climbing, kayaking and more, while also acquiring skills in sports management.

"I love being outside" is a common answer to the question— "Why did you enroll in the Heavy Equipment Operator Program at Wilson Technical Community College, NC?" With over 43 pieces of equipment, students are able to spend everyday outside moving the earth to form the shapes and grades required for construction. And jobs are plentiful in road construction, commercial and residential construction, forestry, local city and county governments.

Other innovative programs cover areas such as biotechnology, Holocaust Genocide, computer animation and gaming, and cutting-edge health technology programs. To find out what is available in these and other fields, check with a two-year college in your region.

