



# College Planning



## As Education Costs Spiral, Community Colleges Can Help Maximize Return On Education

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(NAPSA)—By some accounts, U.S. student-loan debt has reached \$1 trillion. That's more than the entire national debt was in the 1970s.



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Even though students who receive financial aid are graduating from college with an average debt of \$25,250, according to the Institute for College Access and Success, finding a job to pay down their loans has become an extremely difficult task. True, seeking a job in the current economy can be very disheartening, but my advice to new graduates is to hang in there and do everything you can to add to your technical, computer, language and communication skills while you're on the hunt. It's also important to let prospective employers know you're taking the initiative to enhance your education and skills.

My advice to this year's high school juniors—and seniors who are trying to decide on their future educational path—is to seriously consider an alternative to a four-year program, especially if you're undecided about your career goals.

Enrolling in one of the country's 1,100-plus community colleges is a compelling education option that students and their families sometimes overlook. Community colleges provide millions of students with excellent grounding in post-high school education and an opportunity to go on to a four-year college and postgraduate studies. They also help millions more earn certification in fields ranging from information technology to emergency

medical services, nursing and other areas of health care that can lead directly to a meaningful job.

I began my post-high school education at Dean College in Franklin, Mass.—now a four-year college but a two-year school at the time. It was one of the best decisions I've ever made. At Dean, my professors did a great job teaching the course work, but even more important, they energized and inspired me, gave me a real appreciation for the value of learning and guided me at a time when I had no idea what to do with the rest of my life.

Nowadays, enrolling in a community college makes even more practical sense. First, consider that the average annual tuition and fees at a public community college today are \$2,963, compared to an average of \$8,244 at a public four-year college for an in-state student, according to the American Association of Community Colleges. The tuition at a four-year public institution for out-of-state students can be four or five times higher than that—and exponentially higher at a private college or university.

Don't get me wrong: I'm not advocating attending a community college just to save money. I think it's a good idea to explore the alternatives, no matter what your family income situation happens to be.

More affluent families, apparently, are drawing the same conclusion. Recently, the journal *Inside Higher Education* reported on a study from Sallie Mae that showed that 22 percent of college students with annual family incomes greater than \$100,000 attended community colleges in 2011, up from 16 percent over the previous four years. That's a very good indicator that people are

becoming more thoughtful about their education options.

As a businessman, I can tell you I've been looking at return on investment (ROI) all my professional life. In these times of burgeoning tuition costs, mounting student debt and very slow job growth, parents and their children need to carefully evaluate the potential return on their education (ROE) before choosing a path. Education is a major investment—of time and money—and making the right education choices can make a huge difference in a young person's life.

Taking the time now to carefully consider these basic questions and begin to explore all your education options can be of tremendous help in making a decision that will have a lifelong impact. Starting your post-high school education at a community college or working toward professional certification through a community college course of study may provide you with the best possible ROE.

*Related websites that can help you look for and evaluate community colleges:*

• **The American Association of Community Colleges:** a list of community colleges, providing information on school size, courses, tuition, etc. [www.aacc.nche.edu/Pages/CCFinder.aspx](http://www.aacc.nche.edu/Pages/CCFinder.aspx).

• **College Navigator:** run by Institute of Education Sciences, a tool to help students find the right college for them, based on location, campus setting, test scores, extended learning opportunities, religious affiliation, etc. <http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator>.

• **The College Board:** six reasons for students to attend a community college. [www.collegeboard.com/prod\\_downloads/highered/res/cc\\_tips/SixReasons05.pdf](http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/highered/res/cc_tips/SixReasons05.pdf).