

Exploring community colleges

Students learn about benefits of community college and consider whether attending community college could be a good option to help them prepare for their future.

Learning goals

Big idea

Community college can be a good option to consider when preparing for the future.

Essential questions

- What are some of the benefits of community college?
- Could community college be a good option after high school for me?

Objectives

- Research the benefits of community college
- Explore a nearby community college that students might consider attending

NOTE

Please remember to consider your students' accommodations and special needs to ensure that all students are able to participate in a meaningful way.

KEY INFORMATION

Building block:

 Financial knowledge and decision-making skills

Grade level: High school (9-12)

Age range: 13-19

Topic: Earn (Learning about careers, Making money), Spend (Paying for college)

School subject: CTE (Career and technical education), English or language arts, Fine arts and performing arts, Math, Physical education or health, Science, Social studies or history, World languages

Teaching strategy: Blended learning, Direct instruction

Bloom's Taxonomy level: Understand, Apply

Activity duration: 45-60 minutes

National Standards for Personal Financial Education, 2021

Earning income: 8-3, 12-3

Managing credit: 8-6, 12-4

These standards are cumulative, and topics are not repeated in each grade level. This activity may include information students need to understand before exploring this topic in more detail.

What students will do

- Review the College Board’s webpage¹ on frequently asked questions about community college to find at least three benefits of attending community college and to explore one nearby.
- Use the U.S. Department of Education’s College Scorecard website to learn more about the community college they chose.
- Answer questions about the college.
- Write reasons why they would consider attending that community college after high school and reasons why they wouldn’t.

Preparing for this activity

- While it’s not necessary, completing the “Picturing your future self” activity first may make this one more meaningful.
- Print copies of all student materials, or prepare for students to access them electronically.
- Become familiar with the College Board’s webpage on frequently asked questions about community college at <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/planning-for-college/college-basics/types-of-colleges/community-college-faqs>.
- Become familiar with the search function on the U.S. Department of Education’s College Scorecard website at <https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/>.
- Obtain computers or tablets with Internet access so students can conduct research.

What you’ll need

THIS TEACHER GUIDE

- Exploring community colleges (guide)
cfpb_building_block_activities_exploring-community-colleges_guide.pdf

STUDENT MATERIALS

- Exploring community colleges (worksheet)
cfpb_building_block_activities_exploring-community-colleges_worksheet.pdf
- Computers or tablets with Internet access

¹ The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau does not endorse this third party or guarantee the accuracy of this third-party information.

Exploring key financial concepts

Many students choose to attend community college after high school. Community colleges are two-year institutions and offer benefits that some students find attractive. Many community colleges have lower tuition costs and smaller class sizes than four-year colleges and universities. They can help prepare students to transfer to a four-year institution. In addition, many offer workforce development and skills training. Community college graduates typically earn an associate's degree, which is usually awarded for at least two years of full-time academic study beyond high school. Exploring what a community college offers can help you decide if it's the right choice for you.

TIP

Because higher education costs and other details change, students should be encouraged to always look for the most up-to-date information.

Teaching this activity

Whole-class introduction

- Start by seeing what students already know about community colleges.
Ask the class to generate a quick list of things they think they know about community college.
- Read the "Exploring key financial concepts" section to students.
- Tell students that many people who attend community college plan to transfer to a four-year school after graduating. Explain that it's important for community college students to make sure the four-year school they want to attend will accept their credits.
- Be sure students understand key vocabulary:
 - **Associate's degree:** A degree usually awarded for at least two years of full-time academic study beyond high school.
 - **Career:** A profession that may span your lifetime and includes your education, training, professional memberships, volunteering, and full history of paid work.
Can be a synonym for occupation.
 - **Job:** A specific arrangement where you do tasks for an employer.
 - **Occupation:** Describes a type of work with associated tasks, education and training, typical wages, work settings, and more. Can be a synonym for career.
 - **Post-secondary education:** Includes all forms of schooling after high school, not just college.

TIP

Visit CFPB's financial education glossary at consumerfinance.gov/financial-education-glossary/.

- Tell students that they'll visit two websites to learn about community colleges and answer questions about them in order to better understand this higher education option and address any misconceptions.
 - It may be helpful to show students both websites to give them context before having them work on their own.
- Be sure students understand how College Scorecard defines the following terms before they use this online tool:
 - **Average annual cost:** The average annual net price that a student who receives federal financial aid pays to cover expenses (e.g. tuition, living expenses, etc.) to attend a school. Net price is the school's cost of attendance minus any grants and scholarships received. For public schools, this is only the average cost for in-state students.
 - Be sure to make it clear that because this is an average cost and because students receive different amounts of financial aid, the cost that College Scorecard shows might not be the cost students would ultimately pay.
 - **Graduation rate:** The share of students who graduated within 8 years of entering this school for the first time.
 - **Median earnings:** The midpoint of the annual earnings of people who started at this institution 10 years earlier (but didn't necessarily graduate) and received federal student aid.

Individual or group work

- Distribute the "Exploring community colleges" worksheet and computers/tablets to students.
- Students can work individually or in pairs on this activity but should complete their own worksheet.
- Students will first go to the College Board's website at <https://www.collegeboard.org> to search for the webpage on frequently asked questions about community college.
 - Have students search for "community college FAQs."
 - You also can direct students to the webpage at <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/plan-for-college/college-basics/types-of-colleges/community-college-faqs>.
- Using the information from the webpage, students will list at least three benefits of community college on their worksheet.

- Next, direct students to College Board's "Big Future" page at <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/> to find a community college near their home to explore.
- They'll use the "College Search" to find a 2-year college within 50 miles of their zip code.
- Students will then select one of the colleges and get a summary about the school.
- They'll review information about the school and reflect on what they think is positive or negative about the school.
- Students then will visit the College Scorecard website at <https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/> and search for their selected community college to gather more information.
- Students will enter the college's name in the search box. Students then will click the option to see details about the school.
- Students will record the following information:
 - Average annual cost
 - Graduation rate
 - Median earnings
- Next, have students use the "Financial Aid & Debt" information to answer questions about:
 - Median total debt after graduation (This is the median total federal debt of undergraduate borrowers who graduated. This figure includes only federal loans originated at the school; it excludes private student loans, Parent PLUS loans, and federal loans originated at previously attended schools.)
 - Typical monthly loan payment (This is the median monthly loan payment for student borrowers who graduated, based only on federal loan debt originated at the school the student graduated from, if it were repaid over 10 years at the current federal student loan interest rate.)
- Students will review the webpage for other information that might interest them.
- Students then will reflect on this information about the school.
- Based on what they learned from the two websites, students will list on their worksheet at least two reasons why they would consider attending the school and two reasons why they wouldn't.

Wrap-up

- Ask for a few volunteers to share something interesting that they learned about community college.

- If there's time, ask a few volunteers to share information about the school they explored and why they would or wouldn't consider attending.

Suggested next steps

Consider searching for other CFPB activities that address the topics of earning (including learning about careers and making money) or spending, including paying for college. Suggested activities include "Comparing higher education choices" and "Comparing financial aid offers".

You may also consider having students visit their selected community college's website on their own to learn more about the school.

In addition, you could have students use the O*NET Interest Profiler, an online tool from the U.S. Department of Labor that helps people find out what their interests are and decide what kinds of careers to explore. The tool is available at <https://www.mynextmove.org/explore/ip>.

Measuring student learning

Students' answers on their worksheets and during discussion can give you a sense of their understanding. **Keep in mind that students' answers may vary, as there may not be only one right answer.** The important thing is for students to have reasonable justification for their answers.