

The Need for International Students in Community Colleges

Community colleges are not a priority for many international students looking for higher education opportunities in the United States. To put it plainly, these institutions are historically for Americans. However, I believe the community college and the community it serves both stand to benefit from a more international student body. With continually declining enrollment rates¹, community colleges must make efforts to meet the demands of an increasingly globalized 21st-century society if they are to continue their mission of preparing students to enter the workforce or pursue a four-year degree. Additionally, community colleges can provide a unique experience and opportunities to students looking to study in the United States by providing a perspective into unique and perhaps less visible communities.

Often, community colleges serve a student body that may lack opportunities for engaging with international cultures. This highlights the importance of incorporating multiculturalism not only into the student body, but also into the community. The communities that are served by community colleges also tend to err on the side of monoculturalism. Community colleges have the unique mission of not only working to assist the student body, but also to integrate the students into and advocate for them within the community. With an international student body, community colleges can make strides toward incorporating multiculturalism into their communities.

This diversity is vital in a country where less than half the citizens have a passport, and even fewer ever make an international trip. According to Hagedorn (2020), “an international student may be the only person from a specific country or geographic region that native students have ever met.” By creating an internationally diverse space, community colleges can facilitate an out-of-the-classroom education that is as vital as any classroom experience in modern society.

At the same time, community colleges can offer several benefits to international students. The most immediate reason being the same thing that draws local students — cost. According to the College Board, a nonprofit organization that aims to prepare students as they transition to college, average out-of-state fees for community college are \$3,660, compared with \$26,290 for four-year universities¹. The savings made during one's two year degree at community college would easily cover the cost of one's junior year after transferring to a four-year institution. Furthermore, the US government's Community College Initiative enables qualified international students to attend community college at no cost. The program aims to provide skills that benefit the student's home country, such as healthcare or agriculture¹.

Students who take part in the Community College Initiative are also provided with on- or off-campus housing, creating a unique opportunity for them to experience the culture of their host community. While for many international students an education is the primary objective, many also seek to become more globally minded citizens by experiencing American culture. Community colleges, with their generally smaller student bodies and classroom sizes, provide an opportunity for international students to obtain a more personal experience of the American way of life. Greg Zdanowski, a student from Poland, stated that the welcoming nature was the main reason behind his decision to study at a US community college: "I remember my first meeting with the admission office, where people actually had time and knowledge to answer all my questions. There was no hesitation or stress involved"³.

Indeed, compared to four-year colleges and universities, community colleges offer a lower-stress environment and provide more personal attention to their students. These factors are key for international students to not only adjust to a new environment, but also to become comfortable and confident in communicating academically. To this end, community colleges

also provide access to English-language study, specifically on a remedial level. Community colleges often do not require ACT, SAT, TOEFL, or IELTS scores. This means that students who may lack the proficiency in English required by four-year institutions can enroll in a community college English program until they are ready to pursue four-year education⁴. Overall, these remedial English-language courses can pay dividends when it comes time to enter a four-year college or university. In fact, a California study showed that international students who applied to transfer from a community college to a four-year institution had at least double the chance of being admitted compared to students applying directly from high school⁵.

Community colleges stand poised to play an important role in the communities they serve. These institutions can serve to open up communities to people from different backgrounds and cultures, creating more culturally conscious environments. International students will benefit from choosing a community college for a wealth of practical reasons, including lower cost, as well as the intangible benefit of a more personal and community-oriented education, unique to their host community.

Notes

1. <https://www.communitycollegereview.com/blog/international-students-enjoy-free-tuition-at-us-community-colleges>
2. <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/pay-for-college/college-costs/college-costs-faqs>
3. <https://www.usnews.com/education/community-colleges/articles/2019-07-09/what-international-students-should-know-about-community-college-admissions>
4. [Hagedorn, Linda Serra. 2020. International Students in Community Colleges: An Unplanned Diversity. Washington, DC: American Council on Education.](#)

5. <https://www.studyinternational.com/news/benefits-of-a-community-college-education-for-international-students/>