

# NEWS



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## **COMMUNITY COLLEGES REMAIN A BEACON FOR HIGHER EDUCATION AFFORDABILITY IN TOUGH ECONOMIC TIMES**

***College Board report reveals community college tuition is only one-third the cost of an average four-year college***

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The College Board’s annual reports<sup>1</sup> on tuition and financial aid were released this week – and the verdict is that community colleges remain an affordable and cost-effective educational option for many students.

By far, community college tuition remains the lowest of any sector of higher education. Community college tuition and fees cost just 36.2% of the tuition and fees paid at an average four-year college. Tuition at for-profit institutions is 5.6 times higher than community college tuition.<sup>2</sup>

“Community colleges are a beacon of affordability in higher education amid tough economic times,” said George R. Boggs, AACC President and CEO. “They offer quality educational experiences that are tailored to support students at many stages of life – and because they start at a lower price point than four-year colleges, they are easier for students to finance with financial aid, and students are less likely to graduate with debt.”

This fall, community college tuition increases followed a historic pattern of being triggered by cuts in public funding.<sup>3</sup> Still, the average community college tuition only rose by \$172 – from \$2,372 to \$2,544.<sup>4</sup>

Among the higher education institutions analyzed by the College Board, community colleges had the highest percentage change in tuition and fees from the previous year at 7.3%. However, community college leaders point out that community college tuition already starts at a drastically lower price point than tuition at four-year colleges and that tuition costs should be examined over the long-term.

In two of the past 10 years, community college tuition and fees did not increase on an annual basis. “In fact, last year the tuition and fee increase was only 3.4%,” said Boggs. “This year’s percentage increase is still comparatively lower for a student who enrolls at a community college for more than one year, than for a student at a four-year college. Public and private four-year institutions have traditionally larger year-to-year increases, and they’ve had yearly increases every year.”

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<sup>1</sup> College Board, *Trends in Student Pricing 2009* [Trends in Higher Education Series] (Washington, DC: Author, October 2009), and College Board, *Trends in Student Aid 2009* [Trends in higher Education Series] (Washington, DC: Author, October 2009). Herein referred to as *Pricing and Aid*.

<sup>2</sup> *Pricing*, Table 1a

<sup>3</sup> *Pricing*, Figure 10b

<sup>4</sup> *Pricing*, Table 1a

Year	Year-to-Year Percent Changes in Tuition and Fees		
	Private Four-Year	Public Four-Year	Public Two-Year
1999-00 to 2000-01	3.6%	4.3%	-0.4%
2000-01 to 2001-02	8.1%	7.4%	-2.1%
2001-02 to 2002-03	3.9%	8.8%	4.1%
2002-03 to 2003-04	4.9%	13.3%	14.0%
2003-04 to 2004-05	5.8%	10.4%	8.9%
2004-05 to 2005-06	4.7%	7.1%	5.0%
2005-06 to 2006-07	5.9%	6.3%	3.8%
2006-07 to 2007-08	6.9%	6.1%	1.2%
2007-08 to 2008-09	6.0%	6.5%	3.4%
2008-09 to 2009-10	4.4%	6.5%	7.3%

Source: AACC analysis of historical data reported by the College Board

Boggs notes that community colleges are also facing serious strains in today's economy. Faced with record-breaking enrollment in double digits at many community colleges this year, Boggs said that community colleges have added late night sections and scoured budgets for funds to hire more instructors.

The lower cost threshold of community colleges translates into students graduating with less debt. The College Board report on financial aid noted that at community colleges, 62% of associate degree and 70% of certificate earners graduated without debt. Comparatively, only 2% of associate degree and 10% of certificate earners graduated from for-profit institutions without debt.<sup>5</sup>

Community college students received 33% of all Pell Grant awards issued by the federal government.<sup>6</sup> The federal Pell Grant program provides need-based grants to low-income undergraduate and some post baccalaureate students to promote access to postsecondary education.

Because of federal and privately-funded grants, low-income students at community colleges often paid nothing for tuition and fees.<sup>7</sup>

In 2008-09, more than 2.19 million community college students received Pell Grants, which now have a maximum grant of \$5,350 toward tuition and fees. Unlike a loan, the student does not have to pay this money back to a lender with interest.

Only 10% of community college students took out federal Stafford Loans, as compared to 88% of students at for-profit institutions, according to the College Board.<sup>8</sup>

The College Board's reports, *Trends in College Pricing 2009* and *Trends in Student Aid 2009* are available online at [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com).

<sup>5</sup> *Aid*, Figure 7a

<sup>6</sup> AACC analysis of data from the U.S. Department of Education data file "pell-inst-08-09" retrieved October 19, 2009 from <http://www.ed.gov/finaid/prof/resources/data/pell-institution.html>

<sup>7</sup> *Pricing*, Figure 8

<sup>8</sup> *Aid*, Figure 4

**AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEWS**

Dr. Boggs and AACC experts are available for interviews by phone or in the Washington, D.C., media market in person. Schedule by calling Norma Kent, 202/728-0200, ext. 209, 703/585-8556 (cell), [nkent@aacc.nche.edu](mailto:nkent@aacc.nche.edu)

**ABOUT AACC**

For almost 90 years, the AACC has been the leading advocate for the nation's community colleges, which currently number more than 1,177 and serve close to 12 million students annually. Its membership comprises 90% of all public two-year colleges – the largest, most accessible, and most diverse sector of U.S. higher education. As institutions committed to access, community service and lifelong learning, community colleges have long-focused on the needs of adults who are already in the workforce, many of whom are seeking new skills and knowledge for changes in their lives and careers. To learn more about the AACC, visit [www.aacc.nche.edu](http://www.aacc.nche.edu).

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