



# Community College Month

## Theme: “Cultivating Skills for the Future”

Sample Op-Ed:

### Building STEM Communities with Community Colleges

by Shannon Brescher Shea and AnneMarie Horowitz, April 26, 2021

Published on *Energy.gov* (<https://www.energy.gov/articles/building-stem-communities-community-colleges>)

April is Community College Month. We’re jumping in to celebrate by sharing our STEM workforce development and education outreach opportunities. These programs target students from the more than 1,000 public and private community colleges across the United States. (And did you know that Dr. Jill Biden is a community college teacher alongside her role as First Lady of the United States?)

Community colleges educate a diverse student population across age, family educational attainment, race, and area of study, reflecting the nation as a whole. They often reach students who are unable to access traditional, four-year degree programs. According to the U.S. Census, more than 30 percent of college students are undergraduates at two-year colleges. More than half of students in community colleges attend part-time as they develop workforce skills and earn associate degrees, certificates, or baccalaureate degrees. Students at community colleges are able to obtain a high-quality education that’s affordable and can launch them straight into careers or other four-year degree programs.

America is poised to make a major investment in community college infrastructure. The [American Jobs Plan](#) proposes spending \$12 billion for facilities and technologies as well as identifying strategies to address access to community colleges in education deserts.

#### Internships Program

The DOE’s flagship program is our [Community College Internships \(CCI\) program](#) through the Office of Science. It’s a competitive 10-week paid internship for community college students. Students can work at one of 16 participating DOE national laboratories under the supervision of lab technicians or researchers. They work on technologies, instrumentation projects, or major research facilities in support of DOE’s mission. Host laboratories also offer additional professional development opportunities, including workshops, laboratory tours, and scientific lectures. Internships are offered in the spring, summer, and fall.

The experiences of CCI participants mirror the diverse research done at our national laboratories. At Argonne National Laboratory in 2018, [Brenda Escobedo](#) developed a device that mimicked a piece of the Gammasphere Accelerator. Engineers at Argonne were in the process of upgrading the detector and used Escobedo’s device to test the upgrade.

[Mwesi Musisi-Nkambwe](#) interned at Brookhaven National Laboratory through both the Community College Internships program (2003) and the Science Undergraduate Laboratory Internships program



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(2004). During his internships, he improved the interface in the control room of the Relativistic Heavy Ion Collider (an Office of Science user facility) that technicians use to manage the equipment.

At Oak Ridge National Laboratory in 2016, [Nabeel Jaser](#) worked to improve the efficiency of the beamline of one of the most intense pulsed neutron beams in the world. With his mentor, he constructed a tool that scientists could use to change out samples more quickly.

Community colleges provide opportunities for millions of Americans from all walks of life and while the American Jobs Plan is paving the way for even more Americans to benefit, the DOE’s internship program is just one of many ways it supports STEM workforce development and education. For more resources for college and graduate students in STEM from the U.S. Department of Energy, visit [STEM Rising](#).

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### Sample Op-Ed:

## HCC reflects on National Community College Month: ‘We are Howard County’s community college’

by Jess Nocera, April 18, 2019

*Published on BaltimoreSun.com.*

Even though Matthew Arminio has a bachelor’s and a master’s degree, he found himself back in school.

Arminio, 32, of Columbia, has been taking classes at Howard Community College for two years to eventually apply to colleges with physician assistant programs. He holds a bachelor’s in exercise science from West Chester University and a master’s in acupuncture from the Maryland University of Integrative Health in Laurel.

He said he has enjoyed his experience at Howard Community College so far because it’s more flexible and accessible for an “older student” to continue their education.

“I think high school students should work right out of high school, but if they have a vague idea of what they want to do, they should go to a community college, take a bunch of classes and also save money,” Arminio said.

Arminio is one of nearly 500,000 students — 150,000 in credit programs and 350,000 in continuing education and workforce development courses — enrolled in a Maryland community college annually, according to data from Howard Community College.

In honor of April being National Community College Month, HCC has shared 16 facts about Maryland community colleges, including that 70% of all freshmen and sophomore college students from Maryland are enrolled in one of the community colleges.

Kathleen B. Hetherington is the only HCC president to be a community college graduate. Hetherington, who has been HCC’s president since 2007, has spent her entire professional career in community colleges.

“I always share my experience with students,” Hetherington said. “Community colleges were relatively new at that time, and I started at the Community College at Philadelphia and it was the beginning of a career for me.”

After earning her associate degree while at community college. Hetherington went on to receive additional degrees at Penn State, Villanova and Widener universities.

Continue reading at <https://www.baltimoresun.com/maryland/howard/ph-ho-cf-community-college-month-hcc-0418-story.html>



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Sample Op-Ed:

### Local Community Colleges Reflect Legacy of Educational Innovation

By Dr. Carole Goldsmith, April 2, 2023

*Published on GVwire.com.*

For far too long, our Valley has struggled with disparities in health and access to healthcare, employment, wealth, basic technology, and education. We have experienced rising racial tensions while simultaneously aligned with rising racial consciousness. These challenges have been exacerbated by the impact of the pandemic and political divisiveness. And all these challenges stand a greater chance at resolution with an educated citizenry. State Center Community College District (SCCCD) is central to that resolution. Indeed, at no other time have community colleges mattered more.

April is a special month for 7 million Americans, including 1.8 million Californians and more than 53,000 valley residents who are pursuing higher education at a community college. In 1985 the United States Congress authorized and requested then-President Ronald Reagan to issue Proclamation 5418, establishing a “National Community College Month.” This recognition celebrates a uniquely American institution and treasure – the community college.

Today, the California Community Colleges is the largest system of higher education in the nation with 116 colleges serving more than 1.8 million students. This system is an essential resource for the State of California, its people, and its economy. The California Community Colleges bring higher education within the reach of every Californian through an open admissions policy that allows everyone to be accepted, a low tuition rate of only \$45 per unit, extensive financial assistance programs, superb academic counseling and career guidance, outstanding teaching by dedicated faculty, exceptional career training, and specialized support services for students who need extra help with the transition to college or to the mastery of college-level coursework.

#### Fresno Home to First California Community College

The Central Valley has a legacy of innovation in education that continues today. Fresno has a special place in this history as holding the distinction of being home to California’s first, and the nation’s second community college – Fresno City College was founded in 1910 and has ultimately changed higher education in the state. State Center is home to both the first and oldest community college in California and the newest, located in Madera.

Fresno City College is part of the State Center Community College District, which is one of the largest and most successful community college districts in the region, serving over 53,000 students annually in both urban and rural settings at our four colleges and centers – Fresno City College, Reedley College, Clovis Community College, Madera Community College and the Center at Oakhurst and Career Technical Center. The State Center Community College District is a successful provider of educational



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opportunities for students seeking to enter the workforce and/or wish to transfer to a four-year university, with 41% of our students being the first in their families to attend college.

The colleges of State Center Community College District have increased associate degrees awarded over the past five years by 50%, outperforming the state which saw a 24% increase.

And during that same period, the colleges of State Center Community College District have increased the total number of awards – degrees and certificates – by 80%, far above the state average.

While challenges remain, our colleges are moving the region forward in terms of academic success, improving the economic vitality and lifting all our communities. Our student success is a testament to our dedication to our students and reflects their resilience and desire for a better life. The community’s dedication to building a better future through higher education is also evident by the passage of State Center’s capital improvement facilities bond back in 2016.

[Keep reading at GVwire.com.](http://GVwire.com)

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### Sample Blog Post:

## Celebrating our Nation’s Community Colleges

by Amy Loyd, Assistant Secretary for the Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education, U.S. Department of Education, April 19, 2023

*Published on blog.ED.gov, the online publication of the U.S. Department of Education.*

With the founding of Joliet Junior College near Chicago, Illinois in 1901, America’s community colleges have a long history of transforming lives and serving as on-ramps to economic and social mobility. Over the past 122 years, our nation’s community colleges have grown to become integral in the fabric of our education system, serving 30% of all postsecondary students. They are situated to be accessible to virtually every community across the country, rural to urban, our community colleges provide open access to students from all walks of life, including incumbent workers and adults seeking to upskill through credential and degree programs as well as youth—both in high school through dual enrollment, and after high school as they pursue higher education and career-connected learning. For all students, community colleges create seamless pathways to economic opportunity and financial stability.

April is Community College Month and provides a valuable moment to reflect on the vital role that community colleges play as regional economic drivers, connecting workforce and economic development, spanning our k12 and four-systems. They provide students with inclusive, accessible pathways to postsecondary education, [good jobs](#), and bright futures.

Community colleges are integral to the Biden-Harris Administration’s strategy to build back better and to Invest in America. The programs and services they offer are vital to growing our economy in fields such as infrastructure, science and technology innovation, advanced manufacturing, health care, childcare and family services, clean energy, and education. Community colleges also help to address key issues that people across our nation are facing, such as food and housing insecurity, transportation, and the mental and emotional needs of students and their families. In short, without community colleges, our nation would be at both a competitive disadvantage and unable to move forward economically.

The impact of our community colleges is extensive and pervasive:

- Over 10.2 million students are enrolled in community colleges (6.1 credit and 4.1 noncredit in Fall 2021, 35% of all undergrads nationwide (IPEDS Fall 2021 Enrollment Survey)).
- About 66% attend part-time; 34% full-time (IPEDS Fall 2021 Enrollment Survey).
- Community college students are diverse: 27% Hispanic, 12% African American, 6% Asian American or Pacific Islander, and 1% American Indian or Alaska Native (IPEDS Fall 2021 Enrollment Survey).



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- Every year, community colleges help Americans earn over 877,240 associate degrees, nearly 600,000 career and technical certificates, and over 25,000 bachelor’s degrees (IPES Completion Survey 2021).
- And over half of adults in our country with a Bachelor’s degree—myself included—attended community colleges in their postsecondary trajectories.

During this month and throughout the year, we will amplify voices that show the influence community colleges can have on students, their communities, businesses, and local industry. We will showcase:

- The valuable role community colleges play in career and technical education and industry-sought certifications; their deep understanding of local employers’ needs is essential to meeting the needs of today’s workforce.
- Creating accessible career pathways in high-demand areas like infrastructure, broadband, renewable energy, electric vehicle repair, semiconductors, and more.
- Ensuring equitable opportunities for women, people of color, and other underserved students through providing career-building, in-demand industry credentials that align with today’s jobs and jobs of the future.
- How the Biden-Harris Administration is working to lower the costs of attending community college through free tuition and other benefits.
- ED’s [Unlocking Career Success initiative](#), which is a partnership between ED, the Department of Labor, the Department of Commerce, and the White House. This initiative helps blur the lines between high school, college, and career and make sure every high school student graduates with college credit, access to career advising, experience in the workplace, and industry-sought credentials.

[Continue reading at ED.gov.](#)

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### Sample Blog Post:

## This Community College Month, States Should Follow New Mexico by Increasing Educational Opportunities

by Christian Collins, April 21, 2022

*Published on CLASP.org, the website of the Center for Law and Social Policy.*

It’s Community College Month, which is a great time for policymakers to consider how to support the more than [40 percent](#) of undergraduate students who attend community colleges. At the federal level, President Biden’s proposed FY2023 federal budget takes a strong step toward [increased](#) national investment in higher education by boosting funds for the Pell Grant program and minority-serving institutions such as HBCUs. Noticeably absent, however, is any momentum toward universal free community college. The lack of federal movement presents a challenge for advocates of expanding educational opportunities. However, states and municipalities have [countered](#) by passing or expanding their own programs to provide tuition-free higher educational opportunities.

Chief among recent advances for tuition-free education programs is the New Mexico Opportunity Scholarship Act [signed](#) into law last month. The Act has the distinction of being the only state-funded scholarship program in the nation that 1) is available to both recent high school graduates and returning adult learners, 2) can be used for full-time and part-time studies, and 3) can be used for training certificates in addition to associate and bachelor’s degrees. The program covers full tuition and fees at in-state public higher education institutions, and the scholarship lets students “[stack](#)” other aid received through federal aid or private scholarships to obtain additional funds to cover other expenses, such as housing, child care, and books.

### Current Status of State-based Free Tuition Programs

Because New Mexico already had a previous version of its Opportunity Scholarship in place before last month’s expansion, it is not a new entry among the [23 states](#) with at least some version of a state-funded tuition program. All 23 programs can be used to cover tuition costs for 2 years at a community college, but 6 programs limit eligibility to associate degrees from “in-demand” or “high-demand” degree fields. New Mexico’s expanded Opportunity Scholarship has made it the fourth state to cover both two-year and four-year degrees.

### State-Based Tuition Assistance Programs by Program Type<sup>[1]</sup>

Students’ ability to stack the New Mexico Opportunity Scholarship with other financial aid creates new educational pathways for students with lower incomes. This provision makes it a “[first-dollar](#)” program, meaning that it covers tuition and fees upfront and allows students to use other aid sources to cover other expenses. First-dollar programs are more advantageous and flexible for students than “last-dollar” programs, which are less expensive for states and, therefore, more





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common. Last-dollar programs are often unavailable for students with lower incomes since they only provide funding where federal and state grants fall short in covering tuition and fees, leaving no extra funds for students to use for other expenses associated with higher education such as housing and child care.

#### First- and Last-Dollar Programs by State<sup>[2]</sup>

States and localities seeking to implement their own tuition assistance programs should strive for first-dollar programs. Providing less assistance through a last-dollar model can cause students to take on some debt that such programs are meant to avoid, which disproportionately affects students who have lower incomes—particularly first-generation students and students of color. Eliminating community college tuition through first-dollar programs also provides a lifeline for institutions recovering from pandemic-caused enrollment decreases, as tuition assistance is estimated to bring a 26 percent overall enrollment increase in higher education, and 86 percent of that increase for community colleges would be from students who otherwise would not be able to enroll.

Community colleges are a key avenue for postsecondary participation and credential attainment for Black and Latinx students. First-dollar programs would be a lifeline for the 82 percent of Black and 76 percent of Latinx students at public two-year institutions with unmet financial need when factoring in all expenses associated with higher education.

#### Tuition is a Regressive Barrier to Higher Education

In the face of federal inaction on tuition assistance, states have stepped up to counter the impacts of reduced funding of state-level education over the past several decades.

[Continue reading at CLASP.org.](#)