

The New York Times  
**Education**Life

Section 4A/April 22, 2007

# The Two-Year Attraction

To Teach, to Nurse, to Dance  
Or Just to Do High School Math

BY JOHN MERROW

Community Colleges for Achievers

BY BETH FRERKING

Sports in the Junior Leagues

BY ROBERT ANDREW POWELL



ADMISSIONS OFFICES CAN TAKE IT BACK, REALLY • DON'T DO THE CRIME 'CAUSE NOW YOU HAVE TO FILL IN THE APPLICATION LINE



NUMBER OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES: 1,202 • TOTAL ENROLLMENT: 11.6 MILLION • ATTENDING FULL TIME: 40%



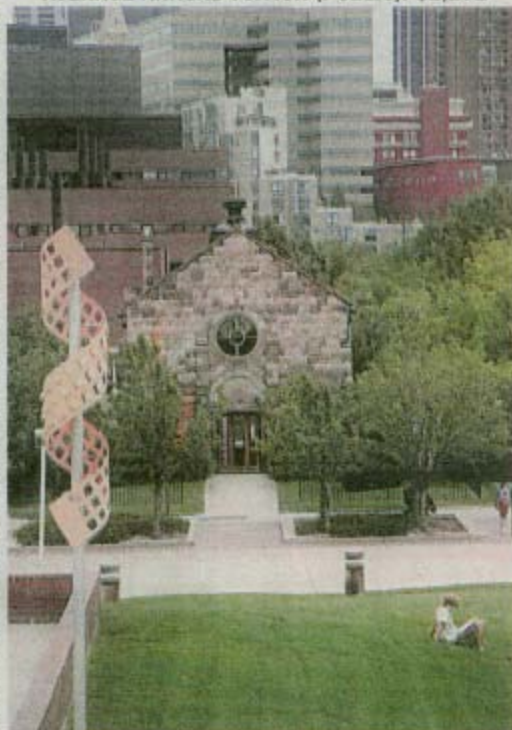
21 OR YOUNGER: 43% • AGE 22 TO 39: 42%



TOP PROGRAMS: REGISTERED NURSING, LAW ENFORCEMENT, PRACTICAL NURSING, RADIOLOGY, COMPUTER TECH



AVERAGE ANNUAL TUITION (PUBLIC): \$2,272



SHARE OF ALL UNDERGRADUATES IN U.S.: 46% • MEMBER OF A MINORITY GROUP: 34% • MALE STUDENTS: 41%

Photographs by Matt Scroshane (Valencia); Randi Lynn Besch for The New York Times (S.F.); Mardell Ostrom (Denver); Michael Nagle for The New York Times (Kingsborough)

## For Achievers, a New Destination

Two-year colleges you may want to attend — and leave.

By Beth Frerking

**Y**OU'VE heard the threat; you may have made it: "If you don't pull up those grades, you're going to a community college."

It's not without reason that community colleges are often considered the schools of last resort. They have long offered low-cost local schooling for students who couldn't attend four-year colleges because they lacked the requisite grades or the requisite funds, or were looking for specific job training. "Open admissions" has been the guiding principle, and the colleges work with large populations of students who are underprepared, notes Terry O'Banion, president emeritus of the League for Innovation in the Community College.

But as four-year universities have become more expensive, good students who want to save money are turning to community colleges to earn their core undergraduate credits. And save money they will: according to a report in October by the College Board, community colleges charge an annual average tuition of \$2,272,

compared with \$5,836 at state universities and \$22,218 at private institutions.

Many two-year colleges are now recruiting students who fit the traditional profile of baccalaureate undergraduates: 18- to 24-year-olds who have strong high school records and are moving directly into higher education full time.

Such students are helping to lower the average age of community college students, which has steadily declined: 42 percent taking courses for credit are under 22, compared with 32 percent a decade ago, according to a 2005 federal study. No longer wed primarily to a work force-training mission, these colleges consider it a major, if not predominant, goal to prepare students to transfer to four-year institutions.

"I'm one of the biggest critics of the focus on work force development," says Margaret B. Lee, president of Oakton Community College in suburban Chicago. "You don't prepare someone in this time of rapid change for a single job. You prepare them for a working life. The old academic skills are the new vocational skills."

### LEARNING LEADERS

Clockwise from top left: Valencia Community College in Osceola, Fla.; City College of San Francisco; Community College of Denver; Kingsborough in Brooklyn.



## COMMUNITY COLLEGE

The two-year colleges most committed to funneling students into four-year colleges tend to have some or all of the following: learning communities (in which students attend classes with the same small cohort of classmates), honors programs (noted for curriculum that crosses disciplines, teachers who hold advanced degrees and smaller classes taken with similarly talented peers) and articulation agreements with four-year institutions in the state (typically synchronizing basic courses with a university's requirements and guaranteeing admittance to transfer students who have kept their grades up).

These colleges focus on liberal arts and the sciences, responding to increasing demand for math and science teachers, health professionals and high-tech experts. The best community colleges also have what experts call "a culture of evidence," meaning they extensively assess students' academic performance and adjust teaching practices accordingly, says Kay M. McClenney, director of the annual Community College Survey of Student Engagement, based at the University of Texas, Austin.

They attract students like Rachel Patrick, 20, who graduated from high school in Clarksburg, Md., with a 4.0 grade point average and a 1380 on her SATs. She was accepted by several four-year colleges but surprised friends by choosing Montgomery College, a community college that admitted her on full scholarship in a selective two-year honors program.

Ms. Patrick has not regretted her decision, she says. The small classes foster a close rapport with teachers and classmates. She traveled to Cambridge, England, last summer in a study-abroad program. She will graduate this spring with an associate of science degree. To hedge her financial bets, she has applied to transfer to 14 four-year colleges. Her top choices are Johns Hopkins, Georgetown and Dickinson College, in Carlisle, Pa.

The community colleges below are considered successful in preparing students to transfer, and typically perform well on national assessments like the Community College Survey of Student Engagement. In interviews with more than a dozen scholars who have examined the practices and results at two-year colleges, these were among those frequently named as models.

### MONROE COMMUNITY COLLEGE (ROCHESTER)

State University of New York  
Full time: 10,094. Part time: 7,015.  
Transfer favorites: SUNY Brockport, Rochester Institute of Technology.

Monroe is atypical among community colleges: It has dorms. About 400 students live on campus, a number that will nearly double next fall when a new residential complex opens. Students live on campus for some of the same reasons their four-year counterparts do: to be close to class, to be among friends and to have the "full college experience," according to an annual survey of the residents (a quarter of whom are from Monroe County itself).

It's the latest evidence of Monroe's gradual retreat from a vocational focus. In 1975, two-thirds of its students sought professional certificates and only a third aimed to transfer. Today, that ratio is reversed. One reason is cost: in-state students pay \$2,700 a year.

Monroe has articulation agreements with 23 colleges and universities in the state, including private institutions like Rochester Institute of Technology, Hobart and William Smith, and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. Recent high school graduates need at least an 85 average in college prep classes to enroll in the 2+2 dual admissions program. On completing a prescribed sequence of courses, graduates can choose from any of its partnering four-year institutions. Students in the program can even take a few courses at the campus before matriculating there.

AND Students skate free at one of four rinks at the ESL Sports Center, home to Rochester's professional hockey team and the college's amateur one.

*Beth Frerking is senior editor at The Politico and former director of the Casey Journalism Center on Children and Families at the University of Maryland.*

### KINGSBOROUGH COMMUNITY COLLEGE (BROOKLYN)

City University of New York  
Full-time students: 7,805. Part time: 6,884.  
Transfer favorites: Brooklyn College, College of Staten Island, Baruch College.

Students study on the beach at this urban campus, surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean, Sheepshead Bay and Jamaica Bay (shoes and shirts required in the cafeteria). "Our Caribbean students love it," says Regina Peruggi, the president. The college is a kaleidoscope of nationalities, with half the student body born outside the United States and only 40 percent non-Hispanic white.

Kingsborough is nationally recognized for its learning communities, originally designed for English as a Second Language students; last year it won a \$100,000 grant from the Ford Foundation to replicate them across the country. While learning communities are not unique to Kingsborough, its program is distinct in scope and ambition: 65 percent of incoming freshmen participate; 80 percent will by 2010. For one semester, groups of up to 25 students take three classes together — a content course, one teaching time management



John Pollock/Richland College

SELF-EXPLORATION "Wholeness" is a goal at Richland.

and study skills, and English. Students in six of the 30 communities study college-level composition; the rest take developmental English. Instructors work in teams to integrate material and meet regularly to talk about how students are doing. MDRC, a nonprofit education research organization, evaluated the program and found that 20 percent more students passed English than nonparticipants. Kingsborough's overall remedial pass rates are high, 64 percent, and about 70 percent of graduates with an associate's degree in arts or science go on to a four-year institution.

AND Students in the maritime technology program participate in a sea/air rescue drill with the Coast Guard and go on a seal count in New York Harbor on the college's ocean-going vessel, the Kingsborough.

### MONTGOMERY COLLEGE (ROCKVILLE, MD.)

Full time: 8,792. Part time: 14,101.  
Transfer favorites: University of Maryland, College Park, University College and Baltimore County.

Situated as it is in one of Maryland's most affluent and educated counties, Montgomery College draws from high-achieving high schools.

The college has several honors opportunities, including a program called Montgomery Scholars, reserved for new high school graduates. Last year, 248 high school seniors (average G.P.A., 3.62) applied for 25 slots. Of these, 16 went to minority students. In its first three years, the program has posted an 83 percent graduation rate, 94 percent for Hispanic students. Montgomery Scholars have gone on to graduate with honors from Notre

Dame, Amherst, Wake Forest, Howard and Georgetown. Graduates from the Macklin Business Institute, the sophomore honors fellowship, are almost universally accepted at the Smith School of Business at the University of Maryland.

Academic success explains only part of the appeal. "It's very much like a family," says Carolina Pena, a sophomore Montgomery Scholar. "I feel so supported, and not just as a student, but as someone who's trying to accomplish more than a 4.0."

AND Thanks to its proximity to the nation's capital, about 20 miles to the south, Montgomery is the only community college that offers internships at the Smithsonian Institution and the Library of Congress.

### VALENCIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE (CENTRAL FLORIDA)

Full time: 12,409. Part time: 17,857.  
Transfer favorite: University of Central Florida.

Big as it is, with four full campuses in two counties, Valencia prides itself on individual attention, especially for new arrivals. Each freshman must attend an orientation class and one-on-one advising session. Students are encouraged — strongly — to write a "LifeMap" outlining their goals so classes can be picked more deliberately. It may sound gimmicky, but it reflects "the whole ethos of creating a culture where students feel cared about and challenged," says Brad Phillips, an adviser on Achieving the Dream, a national initiative to raise student performance at community colleges.

It helps to have financial resources. Thanks to alumni donations, grants and contributions from businesses, Valencia has the country's largest community college endowment, \$50 million, according to the National Association of College and University Business Officers. Students in the top 10 percent of their high school class are eligible for full scholarships.

AND For Valencia's "Visions and Voices Distinguished Artist Series," artists like Billy Collins, the former United States poet laureate, and Joel Zito Araújo, the Brazilian film director, give public performances and hold master classes. Coming next fall: the author Nikki Giovanni.

### SANTA FE COMMUNITY COLLEGE (GAINESVILLE, FLA.)

Full time: 7,474. Part time: 6,628.  
Transfer favorite: University of Florida.

Florida is a big community college state (it has 28 of them), and two- and four-year colleges share course numbers to make credit transfers easy. With the University of Florida in its backyard, Santa Fe considers transfer its main mission, and so do students. "In Gainesville, a lot of people go to Santa Fe before they go to U.F.," says Michael Z. Crumpton, a freshman honors student on full scholarship. "It's very popular."

The result is a college that looks and feels more like a four-year. Students sprawl on outdoor benches under Spanish oaks or sit on the grassy quads between white stucco buildings.

Faculty from different subject areas share office space in mixed "academic houses" — a sort of 1970s "pod mentality," as Anne Kress, interim vice president for academic affairs, puts it. It makes for interesting cross-disciplinary collaboration. One English professor worked with the computer science department to create a writing course that integrated Web technology and research skills.

Students also find the price is right, at \$1,600 for 24 credit hours.

AND Graduates in zoo animal technology, a five-semester program leading to an associate of science degree, work at zoos across the country, including, predictably, Disney's Animal Kingdom in Orlando. The on-campus teaching zoo, which is open to visitors, has 71 species, heavy on birds and reptiles.

### OAKTON COMMUNITY COLLEGE (DES PLAINES, ILL.)

Full time: 3,073. Part time: 7,524.  
Transfer favorites: University of Illinois, Chicago, DePaul University, Loyola.

Chicago's northern suburbs send most of their high school students to college. The public high school serving Des Plaines, Maine West, posted a 94 percent graduation rate in 2005. So it's to be expected that Oakton



offers programs commonly associated with four-year colleges. One writing-intensive curriculum focuses on the "great books" of Western culture; new in the fall, a global studies program examines how race, industrialization and resistance movements affect modern societies.

Oakton also has its share of geek programs, including an undergraduate research experience for students in biology, chemistry and medical technology. This spring, several students are working with scientists at the Argonne National Laboratory, affiliated with the Department of Energy. The college recently received a continuing grant of nearly \$800,000 from the National Science Foundation to bolster learning in science, technology, engineering and math, particularly for under-achieving students.

AND The Koehnline Museum of Art on campus highlights the work of Chicago-area artists as well as non-natives. Claes Oldenburg, Alexander Calder and Salvador Dali are among the featured art stars.

#### KIRKWOOD COMMUNITY COLLEGE

(CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA)

Full time: 5,586. Part time: 6,478.

Transfer favorites: University of Iowa, University of Northern Iowa.

In overwhelmingly white Iowa, it's not surprising that 82 percent of Kirkwood's students are white. But the college is multicultural in other ways. Students come from 39 states and 101 countries. International students, who number almost 600 a year, start out in intensive English-language courses before moving into their majors. Nursing and business are among the most popular, and most take their skills back home, says Mick Starcevic, the college's president.

Close to 100,000 international students attend community colleges in the United States, drawn to the cheaper route to an American degree and to campuses that might be more diverse and more tolerant of imperfect English than four-year institutions, says Norma G. Kent, a spokeswoman for the American Association of Community Colleges. The group sponsors recruitment fairs abroad for two-year colleges. Kirkwood, though, does not recruit overseas. "It's all word of mouth," says Dr. Starcevic.

The college does not have a slate of honors classes. Rather, it encourages strong students to develop individual study projects. This year's project suggestion from Phi Theta Kappa, the national honor society for community college students, is "Gold, Gods and Glory: The Global Dynamics of Power." Students who choose the topic have access to live-broadcast seminars and may participate in trips planned by the society.

A best bet: the agriculture science program is considered one of the country's strongest. AND At the Class Act, a campus restaurant run by culinary arts students, diners can order panko-crusted striped bass with coconut guava sauce — for \$7.

#### RICHLAND COLLEGE (DALLAS)

Full time: 4,594. Part time: 10,225.

Transfer favorites: University of Texas, Arlington; University of North Texas

It's not often you see "joy," "mutual trust" and "wholeness" among a community college's stated values, especially in a city as competitive and fast-paced as Dallas. "At Richland, we say that the 'end' is that we not be selfish," explains the college's president, Steven Mittelstet. "And that is very different than getting a degree and making your first million and not caring about other people."

So what does that mean for students? A lot of self-exploratory journal writing and grappling with the philosophical, religious and ethical questions inherent in their basic studies — such as when life

begins (biology) or what it means to be human (literature, music and art). Students in a sociology class might work in a battered women's shelter. "Whole listening" is in and debate is out, since debaters listen only long enough to marshal arguments in response.

Richland also wants its students to see themselves as citizens of the world. A global studies course examines Islam, a peace studies course looks at the impact of race and ethnicity and an Asia honors class reviews Japanese anime.

AND Students take meditative walks at the outdoor labyrinth, modeled on the one at the cathedral of Chartres, near Paris. It's a half-mile to the center and back.

#### COMMUNITY COLLEGE OF DENVER

Full time: 2,279. Part time: 6,512.

Transfer favorites: Metropolitan State College, University of Colorado, Denver.

John Gardner, director of the Policy Center on the First Year of College in Brevard, N.C., cites the Community College of Denver for its long-term commitment to the success of low-income students. Administrators



MOVING IN At Monroe Community College, students can live in dorms.

were especially worried when the number of freshmen coming back for a second year dropped, by five points, to below 50 percent last year. They blame a new state requirement that students at public colleges prove state residency with two pieces of documentation or pay the out-of-state tuition (\$6,735) instead of the in-state (\$2,101). Many who didn't return were local Hispanic students who lacked that second document (usually a birth certificate), says Christine Johnson, the community college's president. The college, which is 26 percent Hispanic, is working with private donors who are helping such students pay tuition.

The college also offers a battery of support services for first-generation college students, including tutoring and online mathematics and writing laboratories. For giving underserved students a leg up, the college has won the MetLife Foundation's Community College Excellence Award. (City College of San Francisco is another winner.)

The Community College of Denver sits on the grounds of two four-year institutions: Metropolitan State and the University of Colorado. In 1967, the State Legislature decided to save money by creating a three-college campus. Today, the schools share a student center and research libraries. Community college students can also take for-credit classes at either of the four-year institutions.

This arrangement eases the transfer process: some 40 percent of full-time students transfer to either Metro State or C.U. Denver. "It's the power of place," explains Ms. Johnson. "From day one, our students

are on a major university campus."

AND Students in the "Scared Scriptless" theater class perform standup, improvisational and sketch comedy and produce a sold-out show every spring.

#### CITY COLLEGE OF SAN FRANCISCO

Full time: 8,651. Part time: 34,604.

Transfer favorites: San Francisco State; University of California, Berkeley and Davis.

Urban community colleges typically have more part-time than full-time students, and City College has a lot of them. Since the convenience factor is critical, eight satellite campuses are scattered throughout the city, one for English language instruction alone. The college must also satisfy a daunting range of interests, from fashion to astronomy to biotechnology. The national headquarters for Bio-Link, a program devoted to improving biotechnology education, is situated on the main campus.

City College reflects its hometown both in racial composition (40 percent Asian) and culture (programs include Philippine studies; gay, lesbian and bisexual studies; and culinary and hospitality studies). The Institute of International Education consistently ranks City College among the top 10 community colleges in sending students to study abroad. Students can spend next fall and spring studying language and art history in Paris, Florence or Madrid. Foreign study credits are either all or partly transferable to California's two state systems.

The rock-bottom line: \$20 a credit hour, or \$600 for two semesters. And there's an impressive rate of return: 75 percent of full-time students return for the second year.

AND Courses are built around Diego Rivera's "Pan-American Unity" at the Diego Rivera Theater on campus. The mural was commissioned for a 1940 international exposition and subsequently given to the college. The public can view the painting while student docents discuss its history and meaning.

#### SEATTLE CENTRAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Full time: 3,491. Part time: 3,289.

Transfer favorite: University of Washington, Seattle

The commitment to the sciences is evident in bricks and mortar. Last fall, Seattle Central opened a \$27 million math and science building. The college's Rocket Club recently traveled to the Johnson Space Center in Houston to conduct a NASA-approved experiment in microgravity. And each year, a handful of students are selected for 10-week fellowships working with top scientists in the engineered biomaterial research group at the University of Washington.

Students at Seattle Central — Time magazine's "college of the year" in 2001 — do well when they move on. A study of transfers to the University of Washington showed that they performed slightly better than "natives" (students beginning as freshman), with an average G.P.A. of 3.26.

Almost half of Seattle Central's students are minorities; 9 percent are international students, primarily from Asia, intent on transferring to four-year colleges. They pay out-of-state tuition and fees of about \$8,000 a year (in-state: under \$3,000).

"The city of romance, the city of art, Seattle is filled with beautiful music and the sweet smell of coffee," writes Jayoung Jung, a student from South Korea, in a testimonial on the college Web site. "Moreover the mood of rainy days in Seattle makes me feel like I'm seated in a jazz bar."

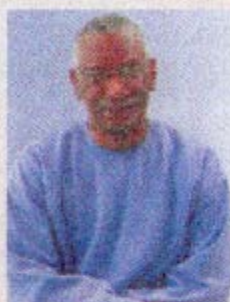
AND The Seattle Maritime Academy's survival course requires students to suit up in protective gear in the water. A few years ago, someone thought it would be fun to scare newbies with fake shark fins; the tradition continues today.





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