

# RECLAIMING THE AMERICAN DREAM

*“American community colleges have served as the people’s colleges and the Ellis Island of American higher education... They do the toughest work in American higher education. And they do some of the most important work in America.”*

*– Reclaiming the American Dream; Community Colleges and the Nation’s Future.*

*American Association of Community and Technical Colleges, 2012*



## Democracy’s colleges

Community and technical colleges are known as “Democracy’s colleges” — for good reason. They are grounded in the core American value that all people deserve the opportunity to move up in the world, regardless of where they are from, what obstacles they face and where they need to start.

Our colleges do not screen out students, but rather, open the doors to everyone with the drive and determination to pursue higher education. Our colleges accept students at any age and stage in their lives and at any educational level. We take students from where they are, to where they want to be.

At a time when college education is the ticket to a middle-class lifestyle, America’s open-door colleges serve as engines of social mobility. The evidence is clear in Washington state, where about 386,000<sup>1</sup> students enroll each year to build brighter futures through education.

## Many paths, common destination

The beauty of community and technical colleges is that they offer many different routes to a successful and productive life.

Students can earn credits to transfer to a four-year institution, saving thousands in the process. Tuition is \$3,846 a year, roughly half the cost of Washington’s regional universities and one-third the cost of research universities.

Once they get there, transfer students do just as well as students who started as freshmen, with similar GPAs and credits earned. In fact, 40 percent of public baccalaureate graduates in Washington start at a community or technical college.<sup>2</sup>

Students can also get the training to enter the workforce directly. Armed with in-demand skills, students land jobs in fields such as nursing, aerospace, cybersecurity, clean energy and advanced manufacturing. Yet others will get the basic skills they need to jump-start their education and career goals.

The educational paths are varied, but they lead to a common destination: a good career and a life enriched with learning. The median annual income of the typical associate-degree graduate is 33 percent more than someone with a high school diploma alone. Those income levels continue to rise with each level of education.<sup>3</sup>

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## A reflection of Washington

Community and technical colleges open the gateway to higher education for students who are traditionally under-represented in universities.

The average Washington community or technical college student is 26 years old. Forty-three percent work, 28 percent are parents and 42 percent are students of color.<sup>4</sup> About 49 percent of the students in eligible programs receive financial aid.<sup>5</sup>

Our students bring diversity to the labs, offices, boardrooms and classrooms of Washington. More importantly, they light the spark of hope in future generations.

## Always a path up

Just as community and technical colleges are engines for upward mobility, the programs offered are the pistons that make it all work: Every credential is designed to spark an even higher level of achievement.

**Student Achievement Initiative:** Our colleges recognize a student version of the theory of motion: “A student in motion stays in motion.” Colleges track every student to find out whether the student is reaching key momentum points that lead to college completion. These include completing a math course, finishing the first year of college and ultimately earning a degree or certificate. The goal is to move students to and through the economic “tipping point” — the level of education that means the difference between struggling in minimum-wage jobs and having a career that leads to economic security.

**Educational building blocks:** Credentials and degrees are designed to move students up the educational and income ladder.

- Basic education and precollege (remedial) programs bring students up-to-speed so that they can pursue college credentials.
- Short-term certificates provide an immediate burst of skills and knowledge to use on the job, but also “stack” together to lead to longer-term credentials or degrees.

- Two-year job-training degrees that don’t typically transfer to universities — such a radiology technician degree — lead to applied bachelor’s degrees at community and technical colleges.
- Two-year associate transfer degrees land students at the junior level at universities so they can pursue bachelor’s degrees.

Every college credential is designed to lead to bigger and better things, bringing the American Dream closer within reach each step along the way.

## Elevating the economy

Like individual students, Washington’s employers rely on community and technical colleges to prosper. Employers need graduates from every level of higher education — from short-term job certificates to associate degrees and bachelor’s degrees. Community and technical colleges meet their needs.

As individual students rise in the workforce, so does our economy. Students who land good jobs bring their skills and purchasing power back to our local communities. Washington’s community and technical college students add \$11 billion to Washington’s economy each year.<sup>6</sup>

## Sustaining hope and promise

Washington’s community and technical colleges sustain America’s promise of hope, opportunity and upward mobility for everyone who is willing to work hard and learn new skills. Every student’s success strengthens our collective American dream and brightens the road ahead for us all.

Sources:

1. SBCTC 2014-15 Academic Year Report.
2. SBCTC research report: The Role of Transfer in the Attainment of Baccalaureate Degrees at Washington’s Public Bachelor’s Degree Institutions, class of 2011, August 2013.
3. Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges and Washington Student Achievement Council. (October 2013). A Skilled and Educated Workforce, 2013 Update. Olympia.
4. SBCTC 2014 Fall Quarter Enrollment and Staffing Report. (2015 Fall Quarter report not yet printed at the time this publication was printed.)
5. SBCTC 2014-15 Academic Year Report.
6. Economic contribution of Washington’s Community and Technical Colleges: Analysis of Investment Effectiveness and Economic Growth, January 2011 by Economic Modeling Specialists, Inc. (EMSI).