

MARYLAND COMMUNITY COLLEGES: AN OVERVIEW

The core mission of Maryland's sixteen community colleges is to provide affordable opportunities to all residents who desire and can benefit from higher education. At Maryland community colleges, which are two year institutions offering associate degrees and certificates, students can take advantage of low tuition, convenient campus locations, open admissions, and comprehensive course offerings for life-long learning.

The state's community colleges serve a growing and diverse population, continually adapting to the changing needs of their communities while remaining true to their basic mission. At a time when technological advances are reshaping the economy and enabling instantaneous communication across borders, Maryland community colleges are actively seeking ways to maintain curricular relevance and produce graduates who are not only prepared to make a living but to function successfully as citizens.

Maryland community colleges are both principal providers of academic instruction (nearly 120,000 credit students annually), and major providers of career preparation and workforce development (over 370,000 registrations). Whether enrolling in associate degree transfer or career programs, certificate programs or participating in continuing education offerings, students can be assured that Maryland's community colleges — as accredited, public, comprehensive, open-admission institutions of higher learning with affordable tuition — are, within the limits of their resources, committed to offering quality programs and services in these areas:

CORE ACADEMIC EDUCATION

Academic preparation is still a core function of Maryland's community colleges. The community college general education curriculum fosters habits of mind and critical thinking that equip students to adapt to changing circumstances whether they enter directly into the workforce or pursue further academic studies. Over half of Maryland resident undergraduates attend community colleges.

TRANSFER EDUCATION

In recent years, many have come to view community colleges primarily as engines of workforce development; but, this is simply one piece of a multi-faceted mission that also includes preparing students for transfer to four-year institutions. Over 5,600 transfer degrees were awarded in 2006, although about half of transfers to senior higher education institutions occur before a degree is earned. Varied Associate degree programs offer students the traditional college-level courses that prepare them for further study toward a bachelor's degree. The Associate of Arts in Teaching, an outcomes-based transfer degree, is a model for graduating high quality transfer students and improving the transition to the bachelor's degree.

JOB TRAINING

The colleges also offer vocationally oriented certificates and associate degrees that prepare students for careers, including the major disciplines of Business and Commerce, Information Technology, Health Services and Paramedical Technologies, Mechanical and Engineering Technologies, Natural Science, and Public Service. About 2,200 certificates and 3,800 career degrees are awarded annually by community colleges in Maryland.

WORK FORCE SKILLS AND CERTIFICATION

Maryland's community colleges have long been recognized for their critical role in workforce development in support of State and local economic development priorities. The community colleges meet these needs with a wide array of credit and noncredit programs in various formats through open enrollment and contract training. They provide educational services and training programs to business and industry in both the private and not-for-profit sectors as well as to national, state and local government agencies.

REMEDIAL (DEVELOPMENTAL) EDUCATION

Remedial courses and programs, which exist on every community college campus, provide a critical device for addressing the community college access mission. They employ basic skill instruction, learning assistance centers, supplemental instruction, and counseling services, and are integrated into the curricula of career and transfer programs. They provide a comprehensive support system designed to improve the academic experience for all students, and especially for those whose opportunities for higher education would be reduced or eliminated without such support. Efforts in this area also include working with the K-12 system to better prepare students to enter college.

ADULT BASIC EDUCATION (ABE)

Maryland community colleges, serving over 30,000 students annually, are the primary provider of ABE and English-as-a-second Language (ESOL) services throughout the state. This includes ABE for learners with skills below the eighth-grade level; adult secondary education for adults earning a high school diploma or the General Educational Development (GED) certificate, and ESOL services for non-native born adults desiring to develop English language skills.

CONTINUING EDUCATION

Through continuing education programs, Maryland community colleges promote lifelong learning and provide a source for intellectual, cultural and physical vitality in the community. Noncredit continuing education courses, offered in a variety of formats responsive to community needs, allow Maryland students to seek career training, boost basic skills and/or enrich their lives through pursuit of a variety of interests. Students may enroll in some credit courses as noncredit attendees and may receive Continuing Education Units (CEUs), a nationally recognized measure of skills or work-related training.