COMMUNITY COLLEGES

The community college is largely a phenomenon of twentieth-century American higher education. The label applies to an array of institutions that offer six-month vocational diplomas; one- and two-year vocational, technical, and pre-professional certificates; and two-year programs of general and liberal education leading to an associate degree. Two-year colleges may be public, private, proprietary, or special purpose, although public institutions represent the majority of community colleges in the twenty-first century. States, counties, municipalities, school districts, universities, and religious denominations have all organized community colleges. Some were designed for specific racial and ethnic groups, for women, or for specific purposes such as business, art, or military training. At the close of the twentieth century, two-year colleges enrolled 5,743,000 students, 96 percent of whom attended public community colleges. Nearly 40 percent of all undergraduate students attended community and junior colleges. Between 1900 and 2000 the significance of this sector of higher education grew enormously as its predominantly public character evolved from a much wider variety of origins.

The multiple forces fueling community college development contributed to confusion over the name and mission of these institutions. The terms community college, junior college, technical college, and technical institute encompass a wide array of institutions.

Two-year college refers to all institutions where the highest degree awarded is a two-year degree (i.e., associate of arts, associate of science, associate of general studies, associate of applied arts, associate of applied science). Generally, community colleges are comprehensive institutions that provide: (a) general and liberal education, (b) career and vocational education, and (c) adult and continuing education. Yet many two-year colleges do not offer the comprehensive curriculum just outlined, and therefore are not truly community colleges in this comprehensive use of the term.

Junior college refers to an institution whose primary mission is to provide a general and liberal education leading to transfer and completion of the baccalaureate degree. Junior colleges often also provide applied science and adult and continuing education programs as well.

Technical college and technical institute refer only to those institutions awarding no higher than a two-year degree or diploma in a vocational, technical, or career field. Technical colleges often offer degrees in applied sciences and in adult and continuing education. Also, there are technical institutes with curricula that extend to the baccalaureate, master’s, and doctorate (i.e., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute), but these are not community colleges. There are also proprietary (for-profit) two-year colleges that refer to themselves as technical colleges, technical institutes, or community colleges. Adding to the confusion of labeling is the fact that community college has become used generically in higher-education literature to refer to all colleges awarding no higher than a two-year degree.

The United States has been able to adapt and capitalize on its diversity of peoples, regions, and economics, in part due to the pragmatic and adaptive nature of its educational system. At the postsecondary level, the comprehensive community college has made a singular contribution to this adaptiveness and pragmatism. While many countries possess binary divisions of their higher-education system (universities and polytechnic colleges or institutes), these are accessible only to individuals with an acceptable performance on government-sponsored high-school graduation examinations. In contrast, American postsecondary education has remained steadfastly committed to inventing courses of study, educational programs, or even whole institutions dedicated to the needs and expectations of its society, peoples, and cultures.

As a distinctively American invention, the comprehensive community college stands between secondary and higher education, between adult and higher education, and between industrial training and formal technical education. Community colleges have provided educational programs and services to people who otherwise would not have enrolled in a college or university. For the most part
community colleges offer admission to all who possess a high school education; in addition, many provide assistance to adults in completing their secondary education. They attract students who live in geographic proximity and who seek low-cost postsecondary education.

The History of Community Colleges

The community college evolved from at least seven sources of educational innovation. Two began in the 1880s and 1890s: (1) community boosterism and (2) the rise of the research university. Three came from the educational reforms of the Progressive Era (1900–1916): (3) the advent of universal secondary education, (4) the professionalization of teacher education, and (5) the vocational education movement. The final two, (6) open access to higher education, and (7) the rise of adult and continuing education and community services, were primarily post–World War II phenomena. The seeds of all seven of these innovations can be found even in the earliest junior colleges.

Boosterism. The development of community colleges generally mirrored that of American higher education in that it was not guided by national controls or policy. In colonial times, while colleges required a charter from the king of England to operate, many began in the absence of one. Similarly, many towns, groups, and denominations began early junior colleges without legal authority, and enabling legislation often followed, rather than preceded, a college’s founding.

Along with the museum, library, opera house, and symphony band shell, municipalities established colleges to provide evidence of their cultural stature relative to neighboring towns and cities. Religious denominations that favored a lay ministry established their own colleges as well. In the nineteenth century the distinction between public and private colleges was not so marked as it is at the beginning of the twenty-first. Communities would band together to found the local college, with the citizens laying the bricks and mortar and raising funds through bake sales. If the community was predominantly Lutheran, then the college might well be affiliated with area Lutheran congregations. If the community had no prevailing religious denomination, then the college might be public. Whether public or private, communities generally had more enthusiasm for founding colleges than providing ongoing support for them, and many of these nineteenth-century colleges failed. With no clear sources of students or finance, economic downturns were particularly difficult to survive. These booster colleges offered programs of varying duration and purpose, but those that survived into the twentieth century became junior colleges.

The Panic of 1893—a major economic downturn in the late nineteenth century—led to the first formal thinking about two-year colleges. Reverend J. M. Carroll, president of Baylor University, convened the Baptist colleges in Texas and Louisiana the next year. The assembly recognized that there were insufficient finances and students to support the numerous small Baptist institutions in the two states. Carroll pragmatically proposed that the smaller colleges reduce their curriculum to the first two years of study and rely on Baylor to provide their students with the third and fourth years of the baccalaureate degree. Thus, the two-year college was born. By limiting the curriculum to the first two years, the colleges required fewer teachers, fewer resources, and fewer students to operate.

The junior college and the research university.

Two years after Carroll proposed the two-year Baptist college as a solution to the financial and enrollment crises in Texas and Louisiana, two northern Baptists gave this invention a name and a place within the broader context of higher education. William Rainey Harper, president of the University of Chicago, believed that the American liberal arts college provided inadequate rigor and quality, thinking their programs akin to the German gymnasium (or high school) rather than true university-grade work. He isolated and strengthened the first two years of undergraduate study in an organizational unit of the university labeled The Junior College. Further, he urged denominational colleges in the area to reduce their curriculum to two years and send their students on to the university, indicating that formal arrangements could be made for the acceptance of their students’ work toward the baccalaureate degree. He also advocated that high schools extend their curriculum to include the first two years of college. Two fellow members of Harper’s congregation, S. V. Hedgepeth and J. Stanley Brown, were superintendents of local high schools (Goshen, Indiana and Joliet, Illinois respectively). Accepting Harper’s offer, they developed junior colleges within their high schools. Joliet Junior College, established in 1901, is generally recognized as the oldest continuously operating community college.
During the latter half of the nineteenth century, American university presidents educated in Germany advocated greater purpose, organization, and eminence for higher education. Leaders like Henry Tappan of the University of Michigan, Alexis Lange of the University of California, David Starr Jordan of Stanford University, William Watts Folwell of the University of Minnesota, and Harper distinguished between university and collegiate grades of work. Collegiate work provided breadth of education in the arts and sciences, and also developed the student's abilities to study and inquire. Junior colleges offered collegiate study, while a university education was devoted to the advancement of knowledge and scientific inquiry. These leaders believed that the general education of undergraduates could be supplied by high schools or small liberal arts colleges and should be limited to the first two years of the baccalaureate program.

National associations were founded and grew around the debate regarding the role of the junior college, the research university, and the liberal arts college, and the organization and sequence of the American baccalaureate degree. The Association of American Universities (AAU), founded in 1900, advanced the agenda of the research institutions. The Association of American Colleges (AAC), founded in 1914, defended the role of the small four-year college and advanced the cause of liberal learning as the primary aim for higher education. The American Association of Junior Colleges (AAJC), begun in 1921, provided a forum for the motley assemblage of emerging institutions, including high schools providing two-year collegiate programs, women's colleges, military institutes, private junior colleges, and technical institutes.

The advancement of the research university and the junior college was abetted by the growth of high schools and compulsory secondary education. In 1907 legislation was passed in California permitting high schools to offer the thirteenth and fourteenth grades—at the time, the state had less than one high school per county. Also that year, President Jordan of Stanford urged the university to abandon teaching the first two years, arguing they were the proper concern of liberal arts colleges; he made no mention then of the upward extension of the high school. Once the 1907 legislation passed and the Los Angeles Polytechnic High School began a two-year post–high school curriculum, Jordan also advocated high schools as providers of collegiate studies. For Jordan, Harper, and other prominent university presidents of the era, the municipal junior college fit their plans for the reform of the university.

**Junior colleges and educational reform.** The first great growth period of junior colleges—1910 to 1920—coincided with the growth of kindergartens and junior high schools. Many school districts constructed junior high schools to relieve the overcrowding in elementary and high schools. Junior highs, like junior colleges, often began as pragmatic solutions. When junior highs opened, the four-year high school became a three-year institution. The restructuring of K–12 education freed high school facilities for the operation of junior colleges. This school expansion and restructuring, along with the passage of mandatory secondary education, also created a shortage of teachers. Teacher-training programs provided through normal schools and junior colleges alleviated staffing shortages in the elementary and secondary grades. Educational leaders of the Progressive Era came to portray these reforms holistically as a system stemming from kindergarten and continuing through high school to “terminal” vocational and general education, or continuing on to the baccalaureate degree, and perhaps to graduate and professional education conferred by the research universities.

Contemporary community colleges hold the collegiate function central to their mission. In addition to the traditional-age student seeking the first years of a baccalaureate degree, collegiate (also known as transfer) courses enroll (1) career preparation students, such as nursing students seeking knowledge in the basic life sciences; (2) reverse transfer students (who begin at a university and later choose to continue at a community college); and (3) part-time casual students (who enroll for personal rather than degree-completion reasons). Collegiate courses may involve core courses or distribution requirements in general education, articulated technical programs in the sciences and mathematics, dual-credit programs in high schools where talented juniors and seniors can earn college credits, and alternative delivery programs—such as evening and weekend courses, televised courses, and courses delivered over the Internet.

**Junior colleges and the normal school movement.** Many junior colleges first began as normal schools. The professional preparation of teachers began in three normal schools of Massachusetts (the first in the nation) that were founded on the pedagogical
principles of Horace Greeley. During the 1880s normal schools were a form of alternative secondary education for those students (mostly women) who wished to teach as a profession. As the number of high schools grew, pedagogy became a post–high school subject. As states adopted compulsory secondary education laws and teacher certification standards, the demand for qualified teachers grew.

Local high schools developed normal-school programs for their graduates, employing teachers with master’s degrees as instructors of pedagogy. For example, the Joplin (Missouri) Central High School added a normal-school program in 1913 to meet the need for qualified teachers in the area. Local citizens interested in collegiate level education urged the school superintendent to inquire of the University of Missouri as to whether general and liberal education courses taken in the postgraduate high school program could be applied to the baccalaureate degree. University president Albert Ross Hill had been one of the university leaders within the AAU calling for the establishment of junior colleges to provide the first two years of college.

In several ways, the last two decades of the twentieth century mirror the first two in terms of public policy issues. In the 1980s and 1990s the quality of elementary and secondary educational programs re-emerged in public discourse. As part of their efforts to reform education, lawmakers in various states proposed that community colleges help to prepare qualified teachers and provide teachers with continuing education and professional development. Similar trends occurred in workforce development. The American Association of Community and Junior Colleges (AACJC—formerly the AAJC, and now the American Association of Community Colleges [AACC]), advocated that community colleges work with area high schools to develop new, intensive, technical-education programs. These programs consisted of two years of science and technology preparatory work in the high school, followed by specialized technical training in the community college. The focus on student performance resulting from the educational reforms of the 1980s and 1990s stimulated examination of the transparency of programs among higher education institutions.

The vocational education movement. Many of the first two-year colleges were primarily or exclusively technical institutes. Lewis Institute, established in 1896, and Bradley Polytechnic Institute (now Bradley University), established in 1897, were founded with the guiding influence of William Rainey Harper. Frederick Pratt converted the Pratt Institute, a vocational high school, into a two-year curriculum for adults “age thirty or so” (Ratcliff 1986, p. 16). In 1891 the Detroit Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) consolidated the evening and day classes it offered adults with the professional curricula of the Detroit College of Pharmacy to form the Detroit Institute of Technology. Chartered in 1909, it provided collegiate instruction in mechanical, technical, industrial, professional, and semiprofessional fields, and in the literary and musical arts. The vocational education movement of the late nineteenth century, the emphasis on technical education during the years of the Great Depression and World War II, the career education initiatives of the 1970s and 1980s, and contemporary workforce-development programs of states and the federal government have insured that vocational, technical, pre-professional, and para-professional programs are mainstays of the community college.

Students pursuing vocational and career-education programs include: (1) traditional-age students preparing for their first job, (2) working adults seeking the upgrading and retraining of knowledge and skills, (3) students employed by local business or industry in internship or cooperative-education programs, (4) members of labor organizations, (5) the underemployed and unemployed, and (6) older adults and retirees seeking to develop a skill or technical knowledge for personal reasons. The programs they select may include specialized degree programs (such as accounting or occupational therapy), career-ladder programs (e.g., moving from engineering technology to engineering), contract training provided to workers of a local company, apprenticeship training programs operated in cooperation with trade organizations, two-plus-two programs articulating high-school and college vocational education, and international training programs. Certain states have separate systems of two-year vocational institutions, such as the Wisconsin Area Vocational Tech-
nical Institutes, while other states, such as Iowa, converted their vocational-technical institutes to comprehensive community colleges in the 1990s.

Open access to higher education. In the United States many colleges and universities were established before a system of secondary education was developed. Harvard, America’s first college, was founded much earlier than college preparatory programs. Land-grant colleges and universities were established many years prior to the provision of secondary education in rural areas—in their first years, more than half of their students enrolled in precollegiate studies. Women’s colleges, colleges and institutes for American Indians, and historically black colleges and universities were established before there were secondary educational programs to prepare these groups for collegiate level studies. This curious American phenomenon required higher education to judge the merits of the students admitted, rather than relying on secondary diplomas and exit exams, as was the case in many countries at the time. Inadvertently, this placed higher education in the position of articulating academic standards for college preparatory and secondary education.

The flood of immigrants coming to the United States between 1900 and 1920 also fueled the growth of community colleges. The educational needs and backgrounds of junior college students diversified as enrollments grew. The suffrage movement and women’s educational expectations augmented enrollment as well. In 1920 less than 4 percent of the American population (238,000 students) went to college. By the end of the 1920s, 12 percent of high school graduates were attending college.

A new wave of immigration began in the 1980s, a wave that continued into the twenty-first century. Once again the United States is expanding and extending higher education to new segments of the population. Some come with little or no formal education or language skills, others come with extensive education but few language skills, while a third group consist of those with English language skills but little formal education. English-as-a-second-language instruction represents as much as one-third of all humanities instruction at community colleges.

Community colleges, as open admissions institutions, hold a unique position in this juxtaposition of secondary and postsecondary education. For not only did higher education assume the role of setting college preparatory standards, but also of providing precollegiate instruction for those able but insufficiently educated to succeed in the rigors of a regular collegiate program. Community colleges increasingly have been called upon to provide remedial and developmental programs and services to those students without adequate levels of academic preparation to succeed in college. Several states and higher education systems, including Colorado, Florida, and California, have prescribed or sought to place developmental and remedial courses in the community colleges.

Community colleges play a significant role in meeting immediate and short-cycle needs of the immigrant, the disabled, and the unemployed with a wide range of courses and programs. Community colleges expanded the scope of higher-education offerings by adding to the curriculum practical and pragmatic courses of study that meet the educational needs of an advanced, complex, and technological society. The federal government has encouraged this expansion through incentives to colleges that serve such groups as displaced homemakers, students with disabilities, those needing adult basic education, and the unemployed seeking job retraining. Programs targeted for these students have broadened the curriculum, subsidized enrollment growth, and provided access to college for those who otherwise could not afford it, thereby widening the demographic profile of students served. The demand for higher education has risen as the value of a high school education has declined in the marketplace of jobs and careers.

Adult and continuing education and community services. Programs and services for adults, for the continuing education of workers in the skilled trades, technical occupations, and the allied professions, and courses and programs of general interest and value to personal and corporate development in the local community have always been a distinguishing feature of community and junior colleges. Early junior and technical colleges (e.g., Pratt Institute, St. Joseph Junior College, Oklahoma Institute of Technology) also provided adult education and community services programs. After World War II, and particularly during the presidency of Edmund Gleazer at the AACJC, this function grew in prominence. Gleazer’s vision was that community colleges would render educational services to the entire local community, not just to traditional college-age groups.
Providing credit and noncredit courses and nonacademic educational services (e.g., films, lecture series, fine art exhibits, musical performances) to the area served became a priority for community colleges in the 1970s and 1980s. Nevertheless, adult and continuing education and community services have been regarded in two ways. One holds them ancillary to general and liberal education and vocational and technical education in the community college. The second views community services not so much as a separate function of the college, but as an intrinsic quality that distinguishes community colleges from the rest of higher education. From this perspective, the role of service to the surrounding community has become fundamental to the definition of the public community college mission.

The Community College Mission

Contemporary discussions regarding the mission, role, and function of the community college rely on historical notions of the evolution of the institution. If one chooses to emphasize the vocational education stream, one may reach the conclusion that community colleges are post-high school, but not higher education. If one examines the success of students who otherwise would not have attended college, then one may conclude that community colleges track students into certain social strata or advance their station in society. Examining the adult education and community services function leads one to conclude that the institutions’ roots are to be found there. In short, a comprehensive community college incorporates an eclectic set of educational philosophies and purposes into its mission.

The contemporary and prevalent normative view of the American community college is as a local, public institution understood by its commitment and connection to the community it serves. While exceptions and variations abound, the evolution of this view from that of junior college, booster college, normal school, technical institute, or private preparatory college was galvanized largely by the 1947 President’s Commission on Higher Education (the Truman Commission), which suggested ‘the name ‘community college’ to be applied to the institution designed to serve chiefly local community educational needs. It may have various forms of organization and may have curricula of various lengths. Its dominant feature is its intimate relations to the life of the community it serves’ (President’s Commission, p. 3). Also significant in its development was the advocacy of the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education (1970) for the establishment of community colleges within commuting distance of every adult. These commissions, together with the Higher Education Act of 1964 (and the Educational Amendments of 1972 to the act that promoted state-wide planning and provision of higher education throughout the nation), enabled community colleges to be rapidly established to meet the swelling demand for higher education among the World War II generation—and among their sons and daughters.

The mission of the community college, like that of other institutions, has evolved in relation to social context. In many cases, the community, junior, or technical college was but one phase in the development of a particular institution. This was especially true of those with origins connected to educating teachers. Brigham Young University, Millersville University, Wayne State University, and Midwestern State University all began as two-year colleges with teacher education programs. As the profession matured, these institutions expanded their programs horizontally, to other fields of study, and vertically, becoming baccalaureate-granting institutions. Liberal arts colleges, comprehensive colleges, and doctorate granting universities, such as Mills College, Bradley University, and the Susquehanna University, also evolved from private junior colleges and technical institutes.

This tendency of two-year colleges to become baccalaureate-granting institutions did not erase from their host communities the need for a community college. California State University-Fresno, the University of Texas at El Paso, and the University of Southern Colorado all began as two-year colleges. When these institutions became baccalaureate-granting institutions, they adopted more selective admissions and broadened their curriculum—both vertically and horizontally. They also left an educational vacuum due to the lack of open admissions, adult education and community services, and two-year vocational and technical programs. A growing social need for an urban regional university did not alleviate local need for a community college, and public demand in these cities led to the establishment of new community colleges: Wayne County Community College, El Paso Community College, and Pueblo Community College. In 2002 the Gates Foundation provided support for seventy small high schools to develop associate degree programs, setting in motion changes similar to those in the 1920s.
and 1930s that brought about many new two-year colleges. As society changes, so will its institutions of higher learning.

Conclusions
The distinctive contribution of community colleges to American higher education is their adaptive, transmutable mission. They represent education’s local, front-line interface with society. To fulfill this transmutable mission, comprehensive community colleges provide (1) general and liberal education, (2) vocational and technical education, (3) adult, continuing, and community education, (4) developmental, remedial, and college-preparatory education, and (5) counseling, placement, and student development services.

In individual institutions, one or more of these five functions may have grown to predominate in response to local needs and expectations. When the small Baptist colleges faced financial exigency in 1894, they restricted their curriculum to two years and sent their students on to Baylor University. In the 1960s and 1970s, when the focus of public educational policy was on accessibility and affordable higher education, community colleges developed outreach programs, personal development and adult education programs grew, and the community dimension of the institution was promoted. In the 1980s and 1990s, when taxpayers sought to curb public spending and to promote economic growth and competitiveness, community colleges dropped personal development courses, and instead defined the needs of adults in terms of employment and economic development. Thus, the demand for the specific functions, programs, and services of community colleges ebb and swell with the social and economic conditions of the municipality, the region, and the nation—and they often may do so more rapidly than at their four-year college and university counterparts.

The community college, in all its various manifestations, is a truly unique component of American higher education. It provides a flexible and adaptive form of higher education tailored to local needs. It helps a complex industrialized society have a full range of education and training—from bookkeepers to accountants to those with an associate degree in business administration—depending on the demands and needs of society and the workplace. Community colleges train the legal aid and legal assistant with general and specialized knowledge to support and complement the work of the lawyer. Community colleges educate numerous allied health professionals who work in support of physicians and surgeons. Career and transfer programs are open largely to all, because the community college also provides the development and remedial coursework necessary for individuals with the capacities, but not the formal education prerequisite, for entry into postsecondary education. These adaptive, flexible, and accessible characteristics are what give community, junior, and technical colleges their unique and singularly important role in American society.

See also: American Association of Community Colleges; Higher Education in the United States; Student Services, subentry on Community Colleges.

BIBLIOGRAPHY
Community education offers a structured, effective way to respond to the challenge to improve public education because it expands the school’s traditional role and creates a mutually interdependent relationship among home, school, and community. Community education has three basic components—lifelong learning opportunities, community involvement in schools, and efficient use of resources—and is based on a set of ten broad principles:

- **Lifelong learning.** Education is a birth-to-death process, and everyone in the community shares in the responsibility of educating all members of the community. Formal and informal learning opportunities should be available to residents of all ages in a wide variety of community settings.
- **Self-determination.** Community residents have a right and a responsibility to be involved in assessing community needs and identifying community resources that can be used to address those needs.
- **Self-help.** People are best served by their leaders when their capacity to help themselves is acknowledged and developed. When people assume responsibility for their own well-being, they achieve some degree of independence.
- **Leadership development.** Training local leaders in problem solving, decision-making, and group-process skills is essential to community improvement efforts.
- **Institutional responsiveness.** Because public institutions exist to serve the public, they are obligated to develop programs and services that address constantly changing public needs and interests.
- **Integrated delivery of services.** Organizations and agencies that operate for the public good can best use their limited resources, meet their own goals, and serve the public by collaborating with organizations and agencies with similar goals and purposes.
- **Localization.** Community services, programs, and volunteer opportunities close to people’s homes have the greatest potential for high levels of public participation.
- **Maximum use of resources.** The physical, financial, and human resources of every community should be fully available and rationally interconnected if the diverse needs and interests of the community are to be met.

### COMmUNITY EDUCATION

In numerous polls and surveys, Americans identify education as one of the leading domestic challenges of the twenty-first century. Specifically, the challenge is not just to reform public schools but also to achieve the goal of academic success for all students. Many educational experts agree that reaching that goal will require increased cooperation among the schools themselves and a new kind of collaboration with the families and communities served by the schools.