



The Two-Year Story: Best-Kept Secrets

Want to know a secret? Forty-five percent of the college students in the United States now attend two-year colleges. These schools are becoming increasingly popular for students with all kinds of goals.

Okay, so that's not really such a big secret. But you might be surprised to learn just how much two-year colleges have to offer prospective students. Everybody knows that community colleges are less

expensive than four-year schools. But there is much more to the two-year college story. Here's a look at some of the "best-kept secrets" of America's dynamic two-year schools.

Top-Notch Instructors

Some people assume that because it costs less to attend a community college, students must settle for a second-rate educational experience. But it is a mistake to equate low cost with inferior teaching.

People who are concerned about the skyrocketing costs at four-year

institutions may view the lower cost of going to their local community college as the main benefit. What they quickly discover when they enroll, is a consistent level of high-quality instruction.

"Community is the heart of community college," says Dr. Shaun L. McKay, President of Suffolk County Community College. "Community colleges have top-notch instructors who devote their time to teaching and to helping students achieve their goals. They thrive on direct contact with students and focus their energies on the classroom experience."

In fact, most community college faculty members have excellent credentials. Those who teach in transfer programs have at least a master's degree, and many hold doctorates. Many also have real-life experiences in the fields in which

they teach, special certifications, or both. An important factor is that those who teach in two-year colleges tend to regard themselves as professional teachers rather than researchers.

Small Classes

Two-year colleges come in all sizes, from small rural schools to large urban colleges that dwarf some universities. But a common denominator in virtually all of them is a commitment to limiting class size.

Indre Caikauskaite, who started at Suffolk before continuing on to Stony Brook University where she earned a bachelor's degree and is finishing her master's degree this spring, says that small class size is one of the biggest advantages of two-year schools. "The small class sizes and direct contact with the professors at Suffolk gave me a strong foundation, encouraged me to continue my studies and prepared me for a larger university," Ms. Caikauskaite notes.

Small classes in community colleges mean a lower instructor-to-student ratio. At Suffolk, average class size is about 23 students. Instructors know everyone's names and they keep up with students personally. The smaller classes help students get more involved, and student involvement is shown to be an important factor in retention and degree completion.

Special Programs

Community colleges are an excellent place to start if earning a four-year or graduate degree is the goal.

For instance, Suffolk currently has articulation, joint admission and "two-plus-two" agreements with more than 34 institutions, including SUNY colleges, and private and out-of-state colleges and universities. The College also offers certificate programs

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Six Keys to Succeeding in College



designed to get well-prepared students into the workforce quickly.

Social Advantages

There's more to college than classrooms and textbooks. Community college students can participate in athletics, student government, student organizations, theatre activities, music performance groups, and other activities. Suffolk has more than 90 student clubs and organizations, intercollegiate and intramural athletics, leadership development, theatre productions, musical performances, art exhibits, films, lectures and concerts. By getting involved in clubs and other activities, students get real-life, hands-on college experience.

Flexibility

Perhaps the greatest strength of two-year colleges is their flexibility. Want to work during the day and attend

school at night? That shouldn't be a problem. Most two-year schools offer extensive evening programs, and some have early morning and weekend offerings in addition to online courses. Suffolk offers more than 275 distance education courses in both fully online and blended formats and a fully online A.A.S. Degree in Business Administration, with no campus-based classes to attend.

Interested in transferring? Students can complete a year or two of studies at a fraction of the cost of a four-year school, and then transfer to a university. Want to avoid four-year colleges? Suffolk offers certificate programs that take anywhere from one semester to one or two years to complete, which allows for quick entry into the workforce.

For more information about the benefits of a community college education, simply call 631-451-4111.

- 1 Start early.** Perhaps the best way to prepare for success in college is to get started as early as possible with processes such as applying for aid, completing admission applications and taking a placement test.
- 2 Plan ahead.** To avoid stress and manage your workload, plan ahead for all of your assignments. Get a course syllabus (or outline) for each course, and read it carefully. There you will find the instructor's expectations as well as a schedule for assignments.
- 3 Connect with other students.** Find a buddy in each class; join a student club or organization, and get involved.
- 4 Choose classes carefully.** Nothing can cause more problems than getting overwhelmed by a class for which you are not prepared. Pay close attention to course descriptions, and consult an advisor or instructor before enrolling each term.
- 5 Seek help.** If you need advice with academic or personal matters, talk with the support professionals who are available to help students. If you have trouble with a class, go to the instructor. Also, check out tutoring services or computerized study aids. Suffolk offers a variety of resources including a Virtual Learning Commons (VLC) with 24/7 online tutorials and interactive exercises.
- 6 Do the work.** It may sound simple, but an essential factor in college success is completing all assignments. Unfortunately, too many students try to get by without reading everything that has been assigned or otherwise scrimping on coursework. If you do everything that is asked of you, the odds of success are in your favor.

Attending that two-year school and then transferring to a four-year school saves money. It also increases the chance of getting into a "reach" school, since transferring is typically less competitive than applying as a high school senior among the masses.

Another plus is that two-year colleges provide solid preparation for succeeding at the next level. With smaller classes taught by highly qualified professors, they provide students the chance to meet general education requirements while strengthening skills in key areas such as writing and math. A real advantage is that students can proceed at their own pace. While students typically complete two years of study before transferring to a four-year college, that's not the only option. Some students move on after only a year. Others earn associate degrees, enter the workforce and then pursue bachelor's degrees on a part-time basis. Since many employers will pay for their employees to take college classes, the part-time option can be especially cost-effective.

Two-year colleges really are a tremendous value that people sometimes overlook because they don't know about these "secrets." Whatever the goal, a college like Suffolk County Community College is a great place to learn more and do more.