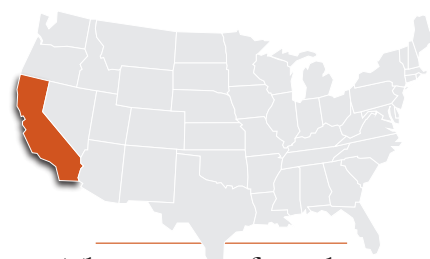


THE REAL COST OF COLLEGE

Time & Credits to Degree at California Community Colleges

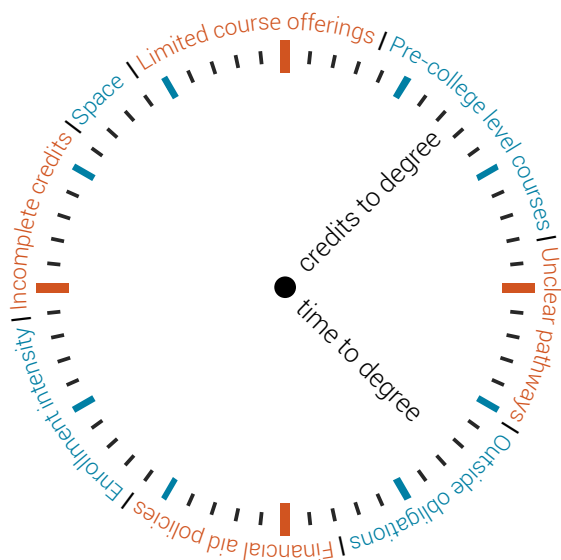
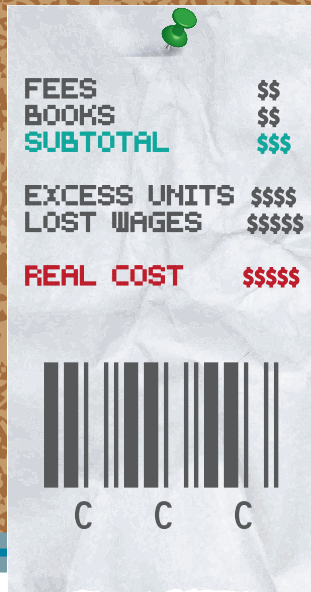
JULY 2014



The State of Higher
Education in California

Taking extra time and credits to earn a degree is costly and makes college less affordable. Students, colleges, and the state pay a high price for the excess time and credits it takes for a student to earn a degree. The longer students are enrolled in college, the more they will pay for tuition, fees, living expenses, books, and other education-related expenses. Students also forgo potential wages they could have been earning because they are still in school and not in the workforce. And, for students who work, they miss out on the higher earning potential that a college credential provides.

A “two-year” community college degree is increasingly rare. Traditionally, students seeking associate degrees spent two years in the classroom and earned 60 credits. But, students who attend California’s community colleges are taking an extended amount of time to complete their degrees and graduating with more than the required number of credits. **In the 2012-13 academic year, California community college students who earned one associate degree only, and no other award, took a median of 4.1 years to do so, attempted a median of 89 credits and graduated with 78 credits.**



What might cause extended time and credits to degree at California Community Colleges?

Many factors contribute to students taking more time and accumulating more credits than necessary to complete their degrees: current financial and space limitations of community colleges, limited course offerings, enrollment in pre-college level coursework, unclear pathways, insufficient student supports and advising, increased obligations outside of school, financial aid policies, credits attempted but not completed, and level of enrollment intensity.

Why do extended time and credits to degree matter?

Higher Costs to Students

Living expenses make up the largest portion of community college students’ budgets and as a result, indirect expenses over extended amounts of time actually compounds the total cost of education significantly. The other cost to students of extended time spent in higher education is foregone wages—wages students do not earn while they are attending school instead.

Every additional year the student is enrolled in college will increase the total cost to that student by about \$7,600 in fees, books, and living expenses and cost him/her more than \$15,000 in lost wages over a lifetime. A student who takes four years to earn an associate degree can spend as much as \$15,200 more on tuition, fees, and other expenses, and will earn \$33,500 less than someone who graduated in two years.

For example, at Los Angeles Area Community Colleges

A student who graduates...	Spends approximately this much out of pocket*	...this amount more than graduating on time	Will earn this much more over his/her lifetime as a result of having an associate degree...	...this amount less than graduating on time	Combination of extra educational expense and lost wages
...in 2 years	\$15,100	—	\$546,400	—	—
...in 3 years	\$22,700	\$7,600	\$530,800	(\$15,600)	\$23,200
...in 4 years	\$30,300	\$15,200	\$512,900	(\$33,500)	\$48,700
...in 5 years	\$37,800	\$22,700	\$480,900	(\$65,500)	\$88,200
...in 6 years	\$45,400	\$30,300	\$457,000	(\$89,400)	\$119,700

Notes: 1) Estimates are for an 18 year old student who will attend full-time and will not work during college; 2) The tool assumes the retirement age at 64 and no unemployment throughout one's lifetime once the degree was earned. 3) Figures in table have been rounded.

* Net price of tuition, fees, books, supplies, room and board, transportation and other expenses.

Source: Student Cost Model Tool (IPEDS average net price by income level and American Community Survey state-level wage estimates).

Higher Costs to the State

When students attempt more credits than they complete at California's community colleges, precious resources are potentially being wasted instead of serving additional students. Even a slight reduction in the number of these excess credits could free up enough dollars and space to serve a significant number of students. For example, reducing average credits to degree by one percent, or the equivalent of one credit, from 78 credits to 77 credits, frees up \$21 million in state spending which could provide enrollment to more than 7,000 additional full-time students.

If credits to degree at California's Community Colleges were improved by...

	1%	5%	10%	20%
Average Credits	77	74	70	62
Student Savings	\$2,000,000	\$8,000,000	\$16,000,000	\$32,000,000
Reinvestment in CCC	\$21,000,000	\$84,000,000	\$168,000,000	\$336,000,000
Additional Space for Full-Time Students	7,320	29,280	58,560	117,120

Source: State Cost Model Tool.

Recommendations to decrease time and credits to degree

1. Ensure all colleges move students through pre-college level courses successfully and quickly and map out clear pathways to degrees.
2. Ensure that the recommendations of the Student Success Taskforce are faithfully enacted at all colleges across the state.
3. Increase funding for colleges to serve and graduate more students.
4. Expand access to financial aid.
5. Provide information on time to degree to students, policymakers, and researchers.