

The 8 Big Differences Between Colleges and Universities

Posted by [Samantha Lindsay](#) | Aug 29, 2019 12:00:00 PM

[COLLEGE INFO](#)

Some schools are labeled as colleges, and some are labeled as universities. What's the difference between college and university? Should you consider going to one over the other? In this article, I'll tell you what it means for a school to be a college or a university and whether you might fit in better at one of the two types of schools.

What Is a College?

In the United States, we frequently use "college" to refer to all types of higher education. Rarely do we say that someone is a "university student" or has a "university degree," though there is a real difference between a college and a university.

The biggest difference between the two is size. That doesn't mean the physical size of the campus—a college is typically focused on one type of degree level. A two-year college will generally offer associate's degrees and a four-year college will generally offer a bachelor's degree. Colleges generally do not have graduate programs, but there are exceptions!

Because they are more focused on one type of degree, colleges often have smaller class sizes and provide students with a greater degree of personalized attention from faculty and advisors. Colleges are usually more devoted to undergraduate teaching and less devoted to research efforts, although many colleges still have robust research programs. They are also more course and subject-oriented in general, meaning that they may teach fewer abstract or theoretical subjects and place less emphasis on hands-on independent research than universities.

There are many colleges that are specialized because of their limited enrollment. Liberal arts colleges are the most common. There are also colleges that focus exclusively on the engineering disciplines. Since the majority of colleges are private, meaning they are not funded by state governments, many have religious affiliations or teach a unique curriculum. For example, a "Great Books" curriculum revolves around the reading and understanding of a library of literature consisting of 100 to 150 books thought essential to Western culture. There are a few colleges whose programs are dedicated to a thorough examination of these works by students, including Thomas Aquinas College and Shimer College.

Colleges that have specific focuses, like military academies, graphic design schools, or visual arts colleges, don't necessarily need to provide broad offerings because the smaller group of students that apply have self-selected for interest in the special qualities of the school.

Most colleges only offer undergraduate degrees and tend to have fewer program offerings in general than universities. Colleges are divided into academic departments, whereas universities may be divided into separate schools based on major type.

Some colleges offer graduate and professional degrees, including:

- The College of William and Mary in Virginia, which offers graduate degrees in the arts and sciences, business, law, education, and marine science
- Dartmouth College in New Hampshire, which offers graduate degrees in medicine, business, engineering, computer science, and more
- St. Joseph's College in New York, which offers graduate degrees in education, business, creative writing, and more

In many cases, these institutions are called colleges simply because of tradition. They began as exclusively undergraduate institutions and later decided to offer graduate programs. Alumni are often reluctant to support a name change for their alma mater, so the college will keep its label to avoid upsetting people who take a lot of pride in the original name.

There is also the rare situation of some colleges that are technically universities, but they can't change their names because a university already exists with the same label. For example, Boston College is a university by every meaningful definition, but it can't change its name to Boston University since that's already a different school.

What Is a University?

Universities are usually larger institutions that offer both undergraduate and graduate degrees. Graduate programs at universities lead to master's degrees and PhDs. Many universities also have associated professional schools for law, medicine, or business. In some cases, students who attend undergraduate programs at universities can earn both a bachelor's and a master's degree in a shorter period of time. There are a few universities that have five-year programs for qualified students, particularly in fields where graduate degrees are vital in the job world (such as engineering).

Often, universities have greater variety in their course and program offerings due to a larger and more diverse student body. Sometimes universities are divided into smaller subsections that might be called "colleges" like "The College of Arts & Sciences" for humanities undergraduates or "The College of Engineering" for engineering undergraduates. All of these "colleges" are still under the umbrella of the larger university. This means that undergraduates who choose to attend universities that are divided in this way usually have to make basic decisions about their fields of study before they enroll.

Universities also have more of a research focus overall. Since there are usually more students, and often the majority of them are not undergraduates, undergraduate teaching may take a backseat to faculty and graduate student research.

On the positive side, universities provide many opportunities for hands-on learning through independent research and partnerships with graduate students on various projects. This leads to higher quality faculty because leaders in academic fields are drawn to institutions with extensive research facilities, although the focus on research over undergraduate teaching sometimes means that faculty at universities are less engaged with students.

Make sure you do your research on each school that interests you individually before dismissing it just for being either a college or a university. Most students will be able to accomplish their goals in the context of either type of school, but one of them might be a slightly better fit for you!

Common Misconceptions

- Some colleges, known as liberal arts colleges, give students an education in a broad range of academic areas as opposed to having them specialize early in one particular subject. Prospective students may also sometimes mistakenly believe liberal arts institutions focus only on the humanities, admissions experts say. But, many of these schools offer degrees in science fields, too. Another common misconception is that schools with "college" in their name don't offer much in the way of research opportunities. However, for example, 65% of students participate in research before they graduate.

AICCU institutions

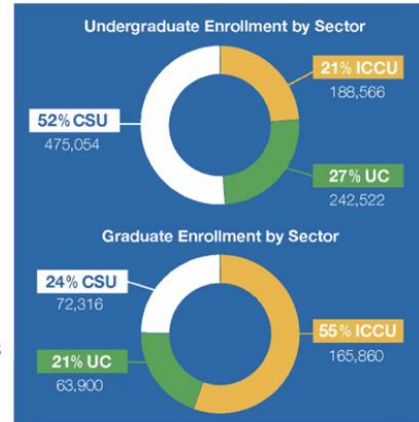
Who are our colleges and universities?

- 85 members
- Representing a wide range of institutions – traditional undergraduate programs, liberal arts, specialized, research, faith based, graduate only.
- Collectively, over 6000 programs available.

Who are our students?

Our Students

188,600	Undergraduate Students
165,900	Graduate Students
43,500	Pell Grant Students
26,800	Cal Grant Students
29,000	Undergraduate Adult Learners
3,900	New CCC Transfer Students
48%	CCC Transfers are of Underrepresented Groups
47%	Cal Grant Students are First Generation



Preparing California's Workforce

Degrees Awarded by Sector

Degree Level	ICCU	UC	CSU
Bachelor's	40,828 (19%)	65,270 (30%)	112,566 (52%)
Master's	39,449 (53%)	13,205 (18%)	19,454 (27%)
Doctoral	9,070 (55%)	6,702 (41%)	597 (4%)

ICCU Share of Key Workforce Degrees

43%

Teaching Credentials

26%

Computer & Info Science

50%

Nursing

93%

Clinical, Counseling, and Applied Psychology

CALIFORNIA
PRIVATE COLLEGE
IS POSSIBLE



7 Podcasts for Students Going Through the Admissions Process

Written by College Confidential | May 24, 2023

Podcasts can offer a wealth of information to busy students, particularly when it comes to the college admissions process. We've rounded up a list of seven helpful college admissions podcasts for people who want an expert advice or an insiders take on applying to college.

[Future U](#)

The Future U podcast was created by Jeff Selingo, author of *College UnBound* and *There Is Life After College*, and Michael Horn, author of *Choosing College*. Select episodes include topics such as community college innovation and "the game of student loans."



[Admitted: The Official College Confidential Podcast](#)

We'd be remiss if we didn't recommend our very own podcast, *Admitted*. Our hosts, CC Student Ambassador Gabby Alphonse and our Community Manager Jon Ericson, meet with real students, parents and admissions experts to get the inside scoop on applying to college, campus life, and more.



[Getting In: A College Coach Conversation](#)

Hosted by Elizabeth Heaton, founder of College Coach, weekly podcasts include topics such as paying for college, mental health issues in college, trends in merit and financial aid and taking a gap year.



[Your College Bound Kid](#)

The podcast was originally based on Mark Stucker's book, *171 Answers: to the Most-Asked College Admissions Questions*, which centered around the queries Stucker receives as a college admissions counselor. Stucker wrote the book and co-hosts the *Your College Bound Kid* podcast, along with co-host Anika Madden, a writer, blogger and mom of three who has seen the college admissions process with her own children.



[College Admissions Decoded](#)

Created by the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC), the membership association for school counselors and college admissions officers, this podcast features interviews with NACAC member-experts to help demystify the college admission process or students and their families.



[The College Essay Guy Podcast](#)

Ethan Sawyer, known as the College Essay Guy and author of *College Essay Essentials: A Step-by-Step Guide to Writing a Successful College Admissions Essay*, has hosted 214 episodes of this podcast. Recent episodes have included diverse topics such as advice for homeschooled students and financial tips for international students.



[Get Schooled by Reeves and Ford](#)

Chris Reeves has been a public school counselor for more than 20 years and is a co-host with Joel Ford for the *Get Schooled by Reeves and Ford* podcast. Recent episodes have covered the college admission scandal, AP vs. dual credit, and "The Great Liberal Arts Debate."



Whatever your listening style, there is sure to be at least one podcast — or more — that can give you more in-depth information about college admissions as you go through the process.

WELCOME TO CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES - <https://www.cccco.edu/>

With **1.9 million students** attending **116 colleges**, our mission is to provide students with the knowledge and background necessary to compete in today's economy.

From our Associate Degree for Transfer program that sets a clear pathway to a California State University or University of California campus, to a burgeoning bachelor's degree program that provides you with the skills and knowledge needed to thrive in high-demand, well-paying industries, to our Career Education programs that make the California Community Colleges the largest provider of workforce training in the nation, we have it all. And we are determined to help you match your interests with our programs and meet your goals.



Sacramento City College American River College Cosumnes River College Folsom Lake College
Web: losrios.edu

Los Rios Promise

Eligibility

- CA Resident
- First Time College Student
- Submit a Los Rios College Specific Application
- Enroll in at least 12 units (max 15 units to be covered)
- Complete each semester with a minimum 2.0 GPA and a 66.67% completion rate
- Complete FAFSA / CADAA application by deadline



Los Rios Promise

Covers

- Tuition and Enrollment fees (up to 15 units).
- 1. Tuition is \$46 per unit

Does not cover

- Textbooks
- Transportation
- Living Expenses
- Health Service Fees
- Student Representation Fee



10 Reasons to Choose the CSU

Serving 460,000 students across **23 campuses**, the California State University plays an integral role in transforming the state and the lives of its people through higher education. As the **largest university system in the U.S.** with a range of studies and locations across California, the CSU provides all individuals interested in furthering their education access to a valuable, life-changing college degree. Here are just 10 reasons to apply to the CSU.

1. A HIGH-VALUE EDUCATION AT AN AFFORDABLE COST
2. AN ENGINE OF SOCIAL MOBILITY
3. A FOCUS ON STUDENT SUCCESS
4. A UNIVERSITY FOR ALL STUDENTS
5. WORLD-CLASS FACULTY
6. A BRIDGE ACROSS THE DIGITAL DIVIDE
7. A HOME TO THE NEXT GENERATION OF EXPERTS
8. A GENERATOR OF INNOVATION AND RESEARCH
9. A CHAMPION OF LEADERSHIP
10. A GLOBAL ALUMNI NETWORK



University of California : 10 campuses. Endless possibilities.

There are nine UC schools that offer both undergraduate and graduate education (UC San Francisco is only a graduate and professional school). The nine UC colleges are UC Berkeley, UCLA, UC Santa Barbara, UC San Diego, UC Irvine, UC Davis, UC Santa Cruz, UC Riverside, and UC Merced.

The UC schools are large public research universities, and they are generally considered to be some of the best public universities in the country. The UC system has more than 280,000 students and more than 227,000 faculty and staff.

Most of the UC schools are big and have over 20,000 undergraduate students. UC Merced, which opened in 2005, is the newest of the UC campuses and has the smallest enrollment. It has around 8,000 undergraduates. UCLA, which has the largest undergraduate enrollment, has over 30,000.

While each school is unique and has its own personality, the University of California schools offer many of the same benefits. As part of the UC system, they're all well-regarded, selective, research-oriented colleges. They're generally strong in STEM, the humanities, and the social sciences.

Here is a table comparing the undergraduate enrollments, average standardized test scores, and acceptance rates for each of the UC campuses. Take a look at the table to get an idea of the size and selectivity of each UC institution.



School	Number of Undergraduates	Middle 50% SAT Score	Middle 50% ACT Score	Acceptance Rate
UC Berkeley	32,143	1340-1540	30-35	15%
UCLA	32,119	1360-1550	29-32	11%
UC Santa Barbara	23,091	1280-1520	26-31	29%
UC San Diego	33,343	1300-1520	28-34	34%
UC Davis	31,657	1230-1490	24-31	49%
UC Irvine	29,449	1250-1510	24-31	29%
UC Santa Cruz	17,864	1200-1450	24-30	59%
UC Riverside	22,866	1130-1400	21-29	66%
UC Merced	8,321	1020-1270	17-25	87%

*The middle 50% SAT and ACT score numbers above are based on data from first-year students admitted for Fall 2019.

WESTERN UNDERGRADUATE EXCHANGE

Spotlight on WUE (woowee!) The Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE) is an agreement among WICHE’s 16 members, through which 160+ participating public colleges and universities provide steep nonresident tuition savings for Western students. Click here for the full list of participating WUE schools! Through WUE, eligible students can choose from hundreds of undergraduate programs outside their home state, and pay no more than 150 percent of that institution’s resident tuition rate. WUE increases affordable higher-education choices for students, and minimizes the adverse impacts of student loan debt.



What We Know

- The 2024-2025 FAFSA will be available in December 2023
- Less Questions
- List up to 20 colleges
- Available in 11 languages.
- It will be easier for contributors (students, spouses, parents) to transfer IRS information to FAFSA.
- New terminology the financial aid eligibility process.
- Role-Based Form (each contributor will only see their questions_



Student Eligibility

Replacing Expected Family Contribution (EFC) with the **Student Aid Index (SAI)**. The SAI is calculated and used to determine ability to pay for college and aid eligibility. There will be changes in the methodology used to determine aid.

Some changes:

- Child support received will count as asset.
- Family farms and businesses will count as asset (regardless of size).
- The number of family members in college will no longer be considered in the need analysis formula.
- Allows a minimum SAI of -1500.

What We Know

- Families with an adjusted gross income of \$60,000 and higher will be required to answer the asset questions on the form
- Family size is based on tax exemptions on IRS forms
- Demographic questions will appear on the student section of the form for privacy (still optional)
- provisional independent student for students with unusual circumstances

What has not changed

- Dependency questions
- Definition of who is a parent
- Needs financial (tax) information from prior-prior year

Better FAFSA Terminology Changes

- **Consent:** Each contributor will be required to provide consent to have their federal tax information transferred from the IRS, have their tax data used to determine the student's eligibility for aid, and allow the U.S. Department of Education to share their tax information with institutions to administer Title IV aid. The consent is necessary even if the contributor does not have an SSN, did not file taxes, or filed taxes in a foreign country.
- **Contributor:** Anyone who is asked to provide information on the student's FAFSA. This includes the student, student's spouse (if applicable), biological or adoptive parent, or the spouse of the remarried parent who is on the FAFSA.
- **Federal Tax Information (FTI):** Rather than importing tax information from the IRS to FAFSA using the IRS Data Retrieval Tool (IRS DRT), application will provide consent to provide their FTI via a direct data share with the IRS.
- **Student Aid Index (SAI):** The SAI replaces what is formerly known as the Expected Family Contribution (EFC). The SAI is calculated from the information on your FAFSA to determine your family's ability to pay for college and is used to determine aid eligibility.
- **Unusual Circumstances:** When a student is unable to contact a parent or contact with the parent poses physical or emotional harm to the student. Students with unusual circumstances will be given a provisional independent status and complete the FAFSA without providing parent information.





Resources for Undocumented Students

As a leader in higher education, the California State University is deeply committed to ensuring academic opportunities are available to all the state's students, regardless of citizenship status.

If you are an undocumented student, there are many resources available to you -- from grants, loans and scholarships to legal and campus support services.

DACA Updates

On October 5, 2022, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the State of Texas, et al., v. United States (2021) ruling that the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Program is unlawful. The CSU acknowledges this decision with regret, and issued a joint statement with the University of California and California Community Colleges. [Stay Current on DACA](#)

Legal Support Services

CSU students and employees: Find out where to get free legal assistance and services on your campus.

Community members: Visit this page to find immigration resources in your area. [Find Your Campus Resource](#)

Admissions Process

Learn what's required for students to apply to a CSU. [See Admissions Information](#)

Financial Aid

The California Dream Act allows undocumented students to apply for scholarships and financial aid. [Explore Financial Aid](#)

Residency for Tuition Purposes

The CSU is committed to ensuring academic opportunities are available to all of the state's students, regardless of citizenship status. [Find Resources](#)

Communications and Guidance

Find communications from CSU leadership, frequently asked questions, webinars and other resources on how to best serve undocumented students. [Read the Communications](#)

Other Resources

Financial Support for Immigration Fees

[Mission Asset Fund](#) is a private organization that provides zero-interest loans for U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services fees, including DACA renewal application fees.

[List of nonprofit organizations](#) that offer assistance with USCIS Filing Fees.

Scholarships

Some private organizations offer scholarships for undocumented students. Students are considered for a scholarship based on variety of factors, such as planned field of study, grades, gender, and extracurricular activities. You can find a comprehensive list of scholarships and application criteria below:

[Immigrants Rising](#) - A list of scholarships for immigrant students, including the New American Scholars Program, which offers financial awards for low-income immigrant students in the Bay Area

[TheDream.US](#): This national scholarship award provides up to \$25,000 for tuition and fees for a bachelor's degree. The Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) has also compiled [a comprehensive list of additional organizations that provide scholarships \(PDF\)](#). It is organized by major, school, gender and location.



[CA Campaign for College Opportunity](#)

Public Charge

[California Immigration Guide](#)

[Public Charge: What is the Rule and What are the Proposed Changes](#) - May 1, 2019 | PDF

Immigration Enforcement -- Know Your Rights/FAQs

[Immigration Preparedness Toolkit](#)

[IRLC: Know Your Rights Red Cards](#)

[ACLU Immigrants' Rights](#)

[UC FAQ for University Employees about Possible Federal Immigration Enforcement Actions on University Property](#)

[FAQ for California State University Employees About Federal Immigration Enforcement Actions on University Property](#) - May 3, 2017

DACA Rescission Information

[Department of Homeland Security Memorandum on Rescission of DACA](#) – September 5, 2017

[Department of Homeland Security FAQ: Rescission of DACA](#) – September 5, 2017

[National Immigration Law Center](#)

[Immigrant Legal Resource Center](#)

[Administrative Relief Resource Center](#)

Webinars

[DACA Decision and Current Efforts to Dismantle](#) – August 12, 2020

[DACA After the Supreme Court Decision](#) – July 15, 2020

[Immigrants' Rights In an Era of Hyper Enforcement and Immigration Services for Community College Students and Staff](#). – April 29, 2020

[Understanding Immigration Options Through Family Petitions](#) – April 15, 2020

[Overview of the Immigration Removal Process & How to Protect Yourself](#) - February 26, 2020

[Demystifying Immigration Policies](#) - December 11, 2019

Lawyer Referral Services

As indicated on the [Legal Support Services page](#), the California Department of Social Services' Immigration Services Unit contracts with qualified nonprofit organizations across the state to provide legal services to immigrants residing in California free of charge, but on a first-come, first-served basis. Additionally, the immigration courts have a [list of lawyers and organizations](#) that provide free legal services. The following links provide referrals to other qualified immigration attorneys. Fees are assessed by the attorney for these services and must be paid by the individual. Immigration lawyers charge different fees for different services, often based on the complexity of your case.

<http://www.ailalawyer.org/>

<https://www.adminrelief.org/legalhelp/>

<http://www.immigrationlawhelp.org>

<https://nipnl.org/>

Federal Government Sites

[U.S. Customs & Border Protection](#)

[U.S Immigration and Customs Enforcement](#)

[Department of Homeland Security Fact Sheets](#)

Should you need casework assistance with any federal program or agency, you may wish to contact the office of either [Senator Kamala Harris](#) or [Senator Dianne Feinstein](#). You can also reach out to [members of Congress](#).