

# What Counselors Still Need to Know about Community Colleges

Response to “What Counselors Need to Know About Community Colleges” on page 118

**A**bstract: Many things have not changed since Esther Hugo’s 2006 article on community colleges. For the most part, “open-door” means just that: “apply and you’re in.” The lenses community colleges use to see students are still complex; the purposes of community colleges are still many. Students of all ages come for transfer, career and vocational training, remediation and recreation. What changes have the recession of 2008 and intense public scrutiny of outcomes wrought?

Community colleges currently enroll about 46 percent of the college-going population (Kolesnikova 2009). “Today, the number of U.S. undergraduates is at an all-time high as more and more people understand the necessity of having higher education in our technology-intensive world” (Kolesnikova 2009, 25). Understanding the options community colleges provide continues to be important for school counselors.

## 1. Community colleges are open to all students.

College enrollment typically increases during economic downturns (Dadashova, et al. 2011). For community colleges this has meant an increase in enrollment accompanied by diminished resources—insufficient funding for instruction and infrastructure (Phillipe and Mullin 2011). Though community colleges remain open-door, desirable programs often are not and many courses fill quickly.

## 2. English and math, reading and technology skills matter.

Increasing numbers of first-generation and low-income students entering higher education, especially community colleges, fill the gap left by diminishing numbers of traditional well-educated children of college-educated parents (Cuseo and

Farnum 2011). Many of these new students bring with them needs for skills-building in English and math, reading and technology. Counselors can help by continuing to emphasize the need for developing these skills before entering college.

## 3. Prepare for the community college placement tests.

Remediation takes time and costs students money for credits that don’t count toward graduation. Placement for college credit English and math courses is determined by assessment prior to enrollment. Counselors can help by encouraging students to review past coursework. They can also help by encouraging students to take scores and required remediation seriously and to complete these courses at the *beginning* of their college careers.

## 4. Understand all options.

College-level course opportunities described by Hugo for California students during high school are also available in Iowa. Even where Advanced Placement courses are available, students can take college credit with expenses paid by state funds. These offer college cost savings for families and introduce first-generation students to the rigors of college courses. They also help school counselors develop a beneficial working relationship with college admission offices.

## 5. Communicate student achievement to your high school community.

FERPA regulations can hinder small schools in their efforts to provide aggregate information about student achievement to high schools. At Iowa Lakes Community College (IA) we request permission from the student to report back to their high school. We also meet on a regular basis with counselors and administrators to communicate students’ needs and successes.

## 6. Apply early.

Open enrollment does not mean acceptance to every program. At Iowa Lakes, students are automatically *accepted to the college*. Programs with requirements that must be met before a student is accepted are in high demand (Wind Energy, Motorcycle Technology and Nursing) Screening for specific skills improves the likelihood of retention and graduation. We’ve also seen that engaging students early improves retention—a campus visit and attendance at a one-day summer registration/orientation makes students 90 percent more likely to enter in the fall.

## 7. Consider honors programs.

At Iowa Lakes, the Presidential Scholars program provides enrichment activities, rigorous coursework, honors at graduation and up to full-tuition scholarships. These important activities help students develop the skills necessary for transfer or the workplace. Counselors’ awareness of community college scholarship deadlines can help students take advantage of all the financial and academic resources available.

## 8. Explore the resources.

Transfer for a four-year degree is not the only community college option available. Vocational and technical training provide appropriate pathways for many. Counselors can aid students in assessing their own interests and abilities, so they make a better match with the community college and are more aware of what their educational goals are.

## 9. Financial aid is available.

Financial aid is more important than ever. California and the rest of the nation have seen costs for tuition and fees rising at a rate that expands the gap between the

full-aid packages and the cost of attending college. The same financial aid is available at community colleges and the gap is narrower because of lower costs relative to four-year colleges and universities. Counselors can make students aware that college is attainable by taking advantage of lower-cost options.

**10. Celebrate the process.**

Counselors can encourage community college attendance by celebrating the accomplishments of *all* their students. Iowa Lakes notifies hometown newspapers of students' acceptance and scholarships received. In our local schools, scholarships are given during awards nights and at graduations.

**REFERENCES**

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**ANNE STANSBURY JOHNSON** is director of admission at Iowa Lakes Community College (IA). She has served on the NACAC Editorial Board and the Presidents' Council, as well as in numerous capacities with Iowa ACAC. She has a MPA from Minnesota State University-Mankato (MN) and is ABD in Community College Leadership at Colorado State University (CO).

# Affiliate Achievers

**Erin Gabriel, Assistant Director**  
 Drake University, Des Moines, IA  
 Iowa ACAC

**Any advice for newbies?**

1. **Make friends with the people on the road.** Some of my best friends are reps with schools A-F (Drake, always in the D's) and we spend quite a bit of time together in the fall so it makes things feel less "detached."
2. **Be able to laugh at yourself.** I've been traveling for the past 6½ years and things never go according to plan!
3. **Have fun.** No explanation there!
4. **Get involved.** Whether it be within the office/campus life or your state affiliate, it's a great way for leadership/meeting people!
5. **Get a survival kit.** Mine (on a good day) has a GPS (my is named Nancy, as in Negative Nancy), Tide pen/Shout wipes, a travel sewing kit, Excedrin, cough drops, updated iPod playlist/car with Sirius/XM radio, and make sure to locate where you can get caffeine throughout your day!
6. **Make your own folder/file titled "When you're having a bad day..."** and start collecting emails, letters and notes from students and parents you've worked with—you never know when you'll need to take a look at it!

**Joe Giacalone**

**Director of International Admission and Recruitment Office of Admission**  
 Marist College, Poughkeepsie, NY  
 Overseas ACAC

**Why are you in this profession?**

In my opinion, it takes an honest amount of self-reflection to truly understand what makes you tick and keeps you motivated.

For this particular era of my life, international admission accomplishes a lot for me. I get the chance to offer life-shaping experiences to young adults eager to explore their own endless opportunities. It provides me with the good fortune to work, collaborate and learn from talented colleagues across the campus and the globe. Finally, this profession allows me to be creative and better understand the world I live in. The ability to positively affect a person's life, my alma mater and my professional career make the perfect package.