



Myself (left), Luis Hernandez (middle), Justin Tom (right). Transfers from Skyline California Community College

## Dear California High School Student, go to community college!

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Something that will instantly remove the negative stigma and shame your peers cast upon you for attending a community college out of high school is receiving your bachelor's degree from a university you want to go to, in a field you enjoy and find yourself debt free in the process. If you are an outlier that worked hard enough to get accepted to a top 25 school and are fortunate enough to have parents that are a part of the top 10% of earners in California disregard this article. However, if you are a part of the majority that does not fall into these two categories, I would highly advise you to read this article thoroughly. Three years ago I entered community college with the negative narrative of community college blasted in my ears, it is a narrative that most high school students are constantly fed. Three years later, I left my community college with acceptances from UCLA, UC Berkeley, UC San Diego, and UC Santa Barbara. I left my community college with an Associate's degree. I left my community college with friendships and

social capital I was told I would miss out on. I left my community college with valuable life skills and direction. However, best of all I left my community college with \$0 of debt thus far, along with scholarships and financial aid that will ultimately cover 100% of all my expenses at UCLA. I'm going to list various arguments in 3 separate categories that will hopefully open your eyes to the best-kept secret in higher education.

## 1. Finances

*Instead of pulling out a high-interest loan for the first two years of my education I was actually getting paid to go to community college (Yes, I actually made a profit).*

### Finances Argument 1: You will save thousands of dollars

Private Universities in California range from 30k-60k annually, the highly sought after University of California (UC) education averages at around 33k annually, the California State University (CSU) option which is undeniably the cheapest choice for a student still exceeds 10k annually when you factor in all expenses. When you compare these three options to a California community college, there is no question which is the smartest fiscal option. A full-time California community college student will only pay around 1-2k annually.

### Finances Argument 2: Financial Aid is for Everyone

Most individuals are under the impression that financial aid is only awarded to those who attend a 4-year institution. This is a common misconception that is merely a myth. The first step starts with filling out a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) no matter what your income level is. After that, your community college will assess your eligibility for two primary forms of aid. First, the California community college system offers what is known as the Board of Governors (BOG) Fee Waiver. The (BOG) waives your per-unit enrollment fee (the current rate is \$46) at any community college in California. It is important to note that you do not have to be in extreme poverty to receive this waiver, in fact, one million California community college students receive the (BOG) waiver throughout the state annually. If you demonstrate even more financial need on your (FAFSA) the second form of aid you can receive is a Federal Pell grant on top of your BOG Fee Waiver. The Pell grant does not need to be repaid and can award you up to \$5,840 per academic year for any expenses.

### Finances Argument 3: Scholarships and Financial Programs

Scholarships are readily available regardless if you are at a community college or a 4-year university. It does take some effort in researching and applying in order to receive scholarship money, nevertheless a great deal of community college students receive at least one scholarship to aid their education. There are various financial programs offered at specific California community colleges. Scholarships are given on both a financial need and merit basis. Additionally, there are government funded programs that are present at virtually every California community college such as TRiO and Sparkpoint. These two great government-funded programs can aid with a broad range of needs. These needs consist of the basics such as

school supplies and books, groceries, financial planning, to even helping you get your first credit card.

### Personal financial experience

I personally benefited from all 3 of these categories throughout my time in the community college system. I received financial aid through the BOG waiver which covered all my enrollment fees along with a 5k pell grant, a 1k scholarship from my community college district, a secured credit card and weekly groceries through Sparkpoint. Instead of pulling out a high-interest loan for the first two years of my education I was actually getting paid to go to community college (Yes, I actually made a profit).

...You probably have already heard the strong financial argument for community college and have no rebuttal. The reason behind sucking your savings dry and pulling out countless loans is to invest in yourself. You believe that you cannot receive the elite education you deserve at a community college. You believe there is no way a lackluster community college can set you up for the future. However, what if I told you finances is not the best argument I have, and instead, my most persuasive arguments are yet to come...

## **2. Academics**

*I was taking the same exact course as the students at San Francisco State just at a remarkably lower price tag.*

### Academics Argument 1: General Education is General Education

The first two years at a 4-year institution you will be forced to take “general education” courses regardless of your field of study. The general education courses at 4-year universities in California are the same exact courses that you can take at any California community college to fulfill your requirements. I remember taking a statistics course with a professor who was also teaching statistics at San Francisco State University. I asked him once if he altered the curriculum in any way from his course at San Francisco State, he replied with “absolutely not”. I was taking the same exact course as the students at San Francisco State just at a remarkably lower price tag.

### Academics Argument 2: Academic Flexibility

Community College gives you much more academic flexibility. What is academic flexibility? Simply put academic flexibility is the ability to do what you wish to do with little to no consequences. In other words, there is significantly less pressure to commit to a particular field of study or commit to school altogether. When you are investing thousands of dollars in a course or a semester, it is tough to back out and switch paths. Whereas in community college you have the freedom to test the waters to see what you truly want to do in the future. You do not like a course, that is fine. You rather do a trade program, that is fine. You want to work full time for a semester, that is fine. Community college gives you the option to find your unique individual path.

### Academics Argument 3: Professors are highly qualified.

A full-time position at a California community college is a highly sought after position with a multitude of qualified candidates. Even young part-time professors have their masters finished at a minimum. These professors are highly motivated to help you develop as a student, with loads of one on one attention.

### Academics Argument 4: Accessibility to professors

Community college professors have one single job and that is to teach you. With this being said you will get the luxury of constantly interacting with your professors on a daily basis. Lower division courses at a 4-year university can have large numbers with professors that are extremely busy. Sometimes the best you can get is a 5-minute window with a teaching assistant. A great example of the one on one attention I received at my community college occurred during my second semester at community college. I was struggling pretty bad with a history research paper, so I finally decided to email my professor who holds a BA from UC Berkeley and a MA from Stanford University (Argument 3!) asking for an hour of his time to help guide my research. My professor instantly emailed me back and set up a meeting time. Our meeting ended up lasting 2 hours in which my professor provided me a step by step roadmap aiding not just this specific research but the research I may do in the future. Another example of the access you have with professors at community college occurred this past fall when I got chosen to present original research at Stanford University. I needed more evidence to strengthen my arguments for my presentation, so I sent my Geology professor who holds a BS from TCU, MS from Oregon State University, and a Ph.D. from UC Santa Cruz (Argument 3!!) an email for resources, within the hour I received a detailed list of various resources. This could be considered an isolated incident and all schools are different; nevertheless, this type of one on one attention will be hard to come by in lower division courses at most 4-year universities.

### Academics Argument 5: You can still get a degree!

I like to compare an Associate's Degree to a minor, understanding that an (AA) by itself will most likely not hold a great deal of weight in the job market. However, when you supplement an Associates Degree with a Bachelor's Degree (BA), you naturally become a much more attractive candidate in the job market. Employers love a candidate that is diverse with a multitude of skills. Community college gives you this extra opportunity to help diversify yourself for the job market, also if you end up not finishing your bachelor's degree for any reason you will at least have something to fall back on.

## **3. Chances of getting into the 4 year university of your choice**

*The UC system has a program for transfers at California community colleges which is arguably the best-kept secret in California higher education. This program is called "TAG" which stands for Transfer Admission Guarantee (yes, you read that right "guarantee")*

Everybody is different and we all have unique personal goals, so I will divide this specific argument into 3 parts that suit 3 distinct students. High school student #1 you got rejected to every school you applied to and are debating school altogether. High school student #2 you got into a couple impacted schools with 50-75% acceptance rates across the board. High school student #3 you got into a multitude of great schools 35-50% acceptance rates, but feel admissions at the elite universities got it wrong, you only want to go to one of the top 5 Universities in California you know you belong at.

### High School Student #1:

You are probably freaking out right now and no one could blame you. Regardless if it was your lack of effort or being immersed in a harsh learning environment throughout high school there is still hope. The California community college system has a fantastic program called a “degree with a guarantee.” This program is offered at all California community colleges and guarantees you admission to at least one of the 23 CSU campuses with the completion of IGETC (general education courses) and major preparatory courses. The campus you are guaranteed depends on your major and the exact university you would like to attend (visit [adegreewithaguarantee.com](http://adegreewithaguarantee.com) for the list of agreements with CSU’s and California community colleges). It is important to note that the guarantee is not correlated with an Associate's Degree (AA), rather the specific degree that guarantees you admission is referred to as an Associates for Transfer (AA-T). It is easy to get these two degrees confused so let me break them down. An (AA) requires you complete 60 units, however these units are geared solely toward the specific field you're studying in order to enter the job market immediately, whereas the 60 units in an (AA-T) contains major prep courses in your field but also specific undergrad requirements that the CSU campuses want for a smooth transition into your junior year. The keyword you should be specifically looking at is “completion” there is no GPA requirement besides passing your courses. That means a 2.0 GPA can get you into at least one of the 23 universities that rejected you out of high school. Furthermore, the California community college system offers a multitude of certifications, trade programs, and now recently 4-year equivalent degrees. Programs offered include fire, EMT, automotive, cosmetology, respiratory therapy, and the list goes on (research what specific community college offers the specific program you are interested in). You may also realize in the midst of your community college journey that school is just not for you. It is crucial that you understand that this realization is perfectly okay. You can hold your head high with no regrets knowing that you made a valiant effort. Another plus side is you still will be entering the workforce debt free!

### High School Student #2:

You received a rejection letter from the majority of the universities you applied to, however, you still got accepted into a couple of great ones and that is something to be proud of. You begin to do research on the school(s) you received acceptance from. You find in your research that it is challenging to get the classes you need in order to graduate early or even on time. You are also not the biggest fan of the area you will have to live in for the next four years, and the loans you're preparing to pull out for a school that was not even your top choice is frightening you. Nevertheless, strong external forces are pushing you to go anyways. You have heard the community college horror stories from adults. What about the embarrassment? What will your

peers think about you if you go to community college? Let's not forget about the extreme FOMO (fear of missing out) you are going to have when you miss out on the "college experience." Now before you go on and make a compulsive decision let's look at some alternative routes for you. Just like Student #1 you can get into at least one of the 23 CSU's through the "degree with a guarantee" program. However, you are most likely looking to go to a high ranking CSU. To your relief, it is more than possible to do so. In the Fall of 2017 freshman applicants got accepted at an 71.6% rate while transfers got accepted at an 75.4% rate system-wide (source calstate.edu). Also, California community college students have historically gotten accepted at an even higher rate than those attempting to transfer in from another 4-year university. Let's move on to California's private universities which you might have had your heart set on but unfortunately got denied. Although the exact percentage differs, virtually every private university across the board in California accepts transfers at a higher rate than incoming first-year students. That statistic also increases specifically for California community college students. An example of two popular private universities in California is the University of San Diego and Santa Clara University. In the fall of 2017 at the University of San Diego there was an 51% acceptance rate for incoming freshmen, but an 60% acceptance rate for transfers. At Santa Clara University there was an 49% acceptance rate for incoming freshmen, but an 54% acceptance rate for transfers. Let's now shift our focus to the UC system. The UC system has a program for transfers at California community colleges which is arguably the best-kept secret in California higher education. This program is called "TAG" which stands for Transfer Admission Guarantee (yes, you read that right "guarantee"). Six of the nine UC's offer this program (excludes UCLA, UC Berkeley, and UC San Diego). This program guarantees you admission with the completion of IGETC (your general education), completion of prerequisite courses for your major, and attaining a certain GPA in the process (3.2 GPA for most). After you fulfill all these requirements you are guaranteed a spot the next fall at the UC of your choice (for more information on the specific UC, major requirements, and GPA requirements visit: <http://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/counselors/files/tag-matrix.pdf>). Even without the TAG program your chances to get into 7 out of 9 UC's is still significantly higher as a transfer (excluding UC Berkeley and UCLA). In the fall of 2017 at UC San Diego we see an 35.9% acceptance rate for incoming freshmen, but an 53% acceptance rate for transfers. At UC Santa Barbara we see an 35.9% acceptance rate for incoming freshmen, but an 52% acceptance rate for transfers. At UC Davis we see an 42.3% acceptance rate for incoming freshmen, but an 59% acceptance rate for transfers. For all 7 UCs, more than 90% of all transfers came from California community colleges (source universityofcalifornia.edu) All in all, Student #2 if you go to a California community college there is a variety of reasons to be optimistic. To see the specific requirements for UC's (Assist.org) will be your best friend.

### High School Student #3:

You are an elite high school student that received numerous acceptances, many of them from great universities that student #2 got denied from. Be that it may, none of them were top choices. You had your heart set on the top 5 universities in California (The top 5 Universities in California according to "U.S. News & World Report" are Stanford University, California Institute of Technology, UC Berkeley, UCLA, and USC). Unfortunately, you got a rejection letter from all 5. If you have the finances in place and decide to head to one of the great universities you were accepted to I would not disagree with your decision. However, if finances

are an issue and it is your dream to attend one of these top 5 schools let me offer you some advice. Unfortunately, when it comes to the California Institute of Technology and Stanford University we see your chances statistically decrease as a transfer for the first and only time. The California Institute of Technology has an 8% acceptance rate for freshmen and an 2.3% acceptance rate for transfer. Stanford has an 4.7% acceptance rate for freshmen and an 2.2% acceptance rate for transfers. Be that it may, it is still possible to get accepted, and even if you are denied a second time you still will be benefiting from the other arguments listed above in this article. However, if your dream school is USC, UC Berkeley, or UCLA then you may want to check out the following statistics. For the fall of 2017, USC had an 16.5% acceptance rate for incoming freshmen, but an 27% acceptance rate for transfers with 49% of those accepted transfers coming from California community colleges. UC Berkeley had an 17.5% acceptance rate for incoming freshmen, but an 24% acceptance rate for transfers with 93% of those accepted transfers coming from California community colleges. UCLA had an 18% acceptance rate for incoming freshmen, but an 25% acceptance rate for transfers with 93% of those accepted transfers coming from California community colleges.

Sincerely,

Alec Roa