

# Community Colleges and Four-Years: the Same, but Different

## A Reference Guide

COMMUNITY COLLEGES	FOUR-YEAR COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES
<b>Student characteristics</b>	<b>Student characteristics</b>
Community colleges tend to represent more racial and ethnic diversity than four-year institutions. <sup>1</sup> Conventionally, community college students have been older than traditional college students (18-22). The average age of community college students has decreased in recent years, as the need for post-secondary education rises along with the cost of four-year institutions. Many students are opting to save money by completing their first two years of college credit at community colleges.	Students at four-year institutions are often younger, have fewer remediation needs, and are less likely to work outside of school. However, in recent years, these statistics have changed to encompass a larger pool of older, working adults with families. Many four-year institutions have responded by offering weekend and evening courses, online courses, and school credit for work experiences.
<b>Curriculum characteristics</b>	<b>Curriculum characteristics</b>
Community college curricula, particularly in the occupational, certificate, and terminal associate's degree programs, tend to be more applied. In CS/IT, that means that most courses take place in a computer lab with students handling, networking, and programming computers. Community college students mentioned they had more graded homework assigned regularly. <sup>2</sup>	Four-year colleges and universities tend to focus on explaining and reading theoretical works. In CS/IT, many courses involve reading textbooks and taking exams. The coursework is not centered on mastering particular programming languages, but on the theory and concepts that underlie programming languages. Interview data suggests that CS/IT class time is spent in lectures, particularly in the first years of study. <sup>3</sup>
<b>Learning environment characteristics</b>	<b>Learning environment characteristics</b>
According to interview data, classrooms at the community college typically have fewer students, a relaxed climate, and more instructor-student interaction before, during, and after class than they do in four-year institutions. <sup>4</sup> Students collaborate, discuss problems and issues in class, and the classroom tends to be non-competitive.	Generally, the four-year institutions offer classes of larger size, and lecture-style learning environments. Students have opportunities to ask questions in smaller seminar sessions with graduate students. Students in CS/IT characterize these classrooms as competitive, with expectations for students to display individual mastery.

<sup>1</sup> Selingo, J. (2007, March). Role reversal. *Prism: American Society for Engineering Education*, 26-31.

<sup>2</sup> Davies, T.G., & Dickmann, E.M. (1998). Student voices in the transfer process: Do we hear them? Do we listen?. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*. Vol. 22, Issue 5.

<sup>3</sup> Barker, L., Garvin-Doxas, K., & Jackson, M. (2002). Defensive climate in the computer science classroom. Proceedings of the 33rd ACM Technical Symposium on Computer Science Education. (SIGCSE 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Fitzpatrick, J., Kuehner, W. Roe, M.A., Keyek-Franssen, D., Snow, E., & Hug, S. (2004). Effective practices at community colleges and four-year institutions for increasing women in information technology (IT) fields. Colorado Institute of Technology, 2004.