College Access in California

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About three in five Californians enroll in college just after high school.

- Recent data show that just over 62% of the 435,000 students who graduated from high school in spring 2020 enrolled in college within 12 months, down from a recent peak of 67% in 2017–18.
- Enrollment rates are below average for low-income (54%) and English Learner students (42%). Just over half (55%) of Black and Latino graduates enrolled in college, compared to 68% of white students and 86% of Asian students. Women (nearly 68%) are significantly more likely to enroll than men (57%).
- College enrollment rates were highest among graduates from the Bay Area (72%), and lowest in the Inland Empire and San Joaquin Valley (53%). Southern California (67%), the Central Coast (also 67%), and the far north (59%) were close to the statewide average.

Whether and where students go to college varies regionally and demographically

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>UC</th>
<th>CSU</th>
<th>CCC</th>
<th>In-state Private</th>
<th>Out-of-State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orange County</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>73</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bay Area</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Central Coast</td>
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<tr>
<td>San Diego-Imperial</td>
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<td>32</td>
<td>64</td>
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<tr>
<td>Statewide Total</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>63</td>
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<tr>
<td>Los Angeles Superior</td>
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<td>16</td>
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<td>North Coast</td>
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<td>N San Joaquin Valley</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inland Empire</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td>52</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: California Department of Education, College-Going Rate (CGR) data; National Student Clearinghouse (NSC).
Notes: “All Students” includes students who graduate from a California public high school with a regular diploma as well as non-graduate completers—students with GEDs and other similar certificates, but not those who receive Special Education Certificates of Completion. Student information is unavailable in some cases due to privacy rights. Regions are based on the grouping of counties in the 2020 census.

California’s community colleges are a key entry point to higher education.

- High school graduates are more likely to go to the California Community Colleges (CCC) than to enroll in the four-year public systems: 32% enroll in a CCC, while 12% go to California State University (CSU) and 8% go to the University of California (UC).
- CCC enrollment rates have fallen in recent years—they are down about 6 percentage points from a 2015 peak. Enrollment at the four-year universities has been relatively stable, increasing by 2.1 percentage points at UC and declining by 0.5 at CSU.
- Just over 3% of students enroll at private colleges and universities in California, while almost 8% leave the state to attend postsecondary institutions elsewhere in the US.
Hundreds of thousands of students apply to UC and CSU each year.

- UC received 211,000 freshman applications for fall 2022, while CSU saw 195,000. CSU applications declined at the onset of the pandemic but have risen by over 22,000 since fall 2020.
- UC accepted 27% of applicants in 2022; acceptance rates varied widely across campuses—from 9% at UCLA and 11% at UC Berkeley to nearly 90% at UC Merced.
- Acceptance rates also vary widely across CSU campuses: 2022 rates were lowest at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo (30%), San Diego State University (39%), and Long Beach State University (40%), while the other 20 schools in the system accepted an average of 86% of applicants.

Community college transfers make up significant shares of UC and CSU enrollment.

- Transfers from community colleges to four-year universities play an outsized role in California, compared to other states. In fall 2022, students transferring from community colleges made up 29% of new enrollees at UC and 42% of new enrollees at CSU.
- A majority of new enrollees at UC (58%) and CSU (51%) graduated from California public high schools. Students from private high schools in the state made up 5.2% of new UC enrollment and 3.4% at CSU.
- Students from other US states made up 2.7% of new CSU enrollment and 3.9% at UC in 2022. International students are more likely to go to UC than CSU: in 2022, 3.7% of new UC students came from other countries, compared to less than 1% at CSU.

Most new UC and CSU students graduated from California high schools

![Bar chart showing percentages of students from different sources for UC and CSU.]

Sources: University of California; California State University.

The state and its higher education institutions are working to expand college access.

- The state is expanding structured dual enrollment programs, which enable high school students to gain valuable experience by taking—and earning credit for—community college courses.
- Initiatives such as Guided Pathways and the Golden State Pathways Program (GSPP) are designed to streamline transitions from high school to higher education and beyond.
- Associate Degrees for Transfer (ADTs) at CSU and the Transfer Admissions Guarantee (TAG) program at most UC campuses play a key role in efforts to increase transfer rates from community colleges and boost the number of students earning bachelor’s degrees.

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