**Weigh the Pros, Cons of a Community College Bachelor's Degree**

**Cost is not the only factor to consider when deciding where to earn an undergraduate degree.**

By [Kelsey Sheehy](https://www.usnews.com/topics/author/kelsey_sheehy), Contributor | Oct. 31, 2014, at 8:30 a.m.

A lack of name recognition and stigma are some of the cons of getting a bachelor's degree at a community college.

Ask Daron Vchulek where he did​ undergraduate degree and he'll proudly tell you Bellevue College.

"I'm happy and proud to be part of that whole system," says Vchulek, vice president of ancillary services at a physician-owned clinic in Seattle. "I know I got a great education."

Once strictly a two-year institution offering associate and technical degrees, Bellevue College is one of more than a dozen [community colleges in Washington state](https://www.usnews.com/education/community-colleges/washington) that now offer bachelor's degrees in select fields.

Washington is not the only state going this route, though. In [Florida](https://www.usnews.com/education/community-colleges/florida), nearly 25 [community colleges](https://www.usnews.com/education/community-colleges) offer bachelor's degrees, and [California passed legislation in September](https://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2014/09/29/the-10-000-community-college-ba) that will allow some of the state's two-year colleges to expand to four-year degree programs.

Select community colleges in [West Virginia](https://www.usnews.com/education/community-colleges/west-virginia), [Texas](https://www.usnews.com/education/community-colleges/texas), [Hawaii](https://www.usnews.com/education/community-colleges/hawaii) and a handful of other states are also part of the bachelor's degree club.

There are some definite upsides to earning a bachelor's from a community college – cost being at the top of the list – but price isn't the only factor to consider, says Stephanie Kennedy, founder of [My College Planning Team](http://mycollegeplanningteam.com/about/),​ a Chicago-based college counseling firm that specializes in admissions and financing.

"Compare it to a young family choosing a home to buy," she says. "The buyer considers not just the purchase price​ but the neighborhood, the yard, the local schools, transportation options, community services and safety."

Before flocking to the admissions office of the nearest junior college, prospective students should consider the following pros and cons of earning a bachelor's at a community college.

**Pro:** Cost is an obvious upside to earning a bachelor's through a community college. Vchulek, who already had an associate degree, estimates the total cost of his bachelor's was less than $7,000 for two years. That's roughly half the cost of two years at nearby universities, says Vchulek, who graduated in June 2012.

Unlike four-year universities, most community colleges do not offer housing, but room and board is a considerable expense that students should factor into their estimated costs.

At Bellevue College, for example, tuition and fees for a full-time student totaled $3,763 for the 2012-2013 school year. With housing, meals and other expenses factored in, that amount jumps to $20,029, according to the school's [net price calculator](https://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/paying-for-college/articles/2011/12/15/10-things-you-need-to-know-about-net-price-calculators). That's still more than $7,000 less than the total cost of attendance at nearby Washington State University.

A college's [net price calculator](https://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/features/net-price-calculator) will give students an estimate of tuition and fees for one year, as well as housing, books, meals and other expenses. The calculator will also factor in any scholarships or grants a student might be eligible for, giving a more complete picture of potential out-of-pocket costs.

**Con:** Community colleges often have limited bachelor's degree options. Seminole State College​ of Florida, for example, has five bachelor's programs: interior design, construction, engineering technology, information systems technology and business information and management. The [University of Central Florida](https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/ucf-3954), by comparison, has close to 125 undergraduate degree options.

Bachelor's degree programs at community colleges are often tied to local career opportunities. The narrow degree options are great for students who know exactly which field they are aiming for, but don't leave a lot of wiggle room to change majors – something a majority of college students do at least once, according to various reports.

**Pro:** Schedules for bachelor's programs at community colleges often cater to working students. A mix of night classes and [online courses](https://www.usnews.com/education/online-education) allowed Vchulek to complete his degree while still working full time. This allowed him to pay for his classes as he went, so he graduated debt free, he says.

It also allowed him to take what he learned in class and immediately apply it to his job as a director at the clinic, helping him earn a promotion to his current vice president role before he finished his bachelor's degree.

**Con:** Community college still suffers from a bit of an image problem, says Sean Moore, a certified financial planner at SMART College Funding in Florida.

The stigma and lack of name recognition are two drawbacks of having a bachelor's from a community college, Moore says, noting that some schools are rebranding themselves to overcome this hurdle.

"My home state of Florida is no longer calling these schools 'community colleges' and has rebranded them as 'state colleges,'" he says.

[Brevard Community College](https://www.usnews.com/education/community-colleges/brevard-community-college-CC00747), for example, is now called Eastern Florida State College. And Bellevue Community College, where Vchulek earned his associate degree, was simply Bellevue College by the time he returned for his bachelor's.

Vchulek insists stigma wasn't an issue with his degree, though it was a concern he explored before choosing Bellevue.

"I talked to people in our HR department and people in the community and asked, 'Would it make a difference if I was applying with a bachelor's from Bellevue versus a well-known college in the area?'" he says. "And all said it wouldn't make a difference, as long as it was an accredited college."

Vchulek also checked with area universities to see if a bachelor's from a community college would hurt his chances of being accepted into an MBA program. It didn't. Vchulek graduated from [Washington State University](https://www.usnews.com/best-graduate-schools/top-business-schools/washington-state-university-01241)'s executive MBA program earlier this year.