

State Universities

Academics

Offers four-year (bachelor's) degrees and a broad variety of programs. Class sizes – particularly general core courses - may be large. Some state universities also offer associate (two-year) degrees as well as advanced and pre-professional and professional studies.

Cost

Tuition rates are generally less expensive than private institutions

Campus Life

Big schools are often hubs of activity in terms of sports, cultural events, clubs, sororities and fraternities, and special-interest groups.

Independent Colleges

Academics

Private schools may offer fewer academic choices than a state school, but class sizes are generally smaller, meaning you'll likely get more individual attention from professors and staff.

Cost

At first glance, tuition costs may look to be way out of your range. But private schools may have more grants, loans and scholarships available – which could put a private school within the same price range as a public school. Experts advise looking for the program you want first, then working with the school to work out the financial details.

Campus Life

Smaller campuses make it easier to get know other students. Plus, since there are fewer people, you'll have more opportunities to get involved in athletics, drama or other campus groups.

What's the Difference?

Academics

Community colleges offer a variety of two-year majors and programs, which provide either specialized job training or preparation for transfer to a four-year program. Many students find it best to get their first two years of general coursework at a community college, which also gives them more time to decide on a major.

Cost

You won't find a better deal for your first two years of college. And, since community colleges are designed to offer higher education close to home, you save room and board money by living at home. Many experts advise going the community college route from both an academic and financial standpoint.

Campus Life

There's less of a campus feel than in four-year schools, but you'll also find a mix of different types of people from all walks of life as many people seeking a career change opt for a community college.

Community Colleges

Academics

Technical colleges provide a curriculum focused on preparation for specific careers (such as automotive, cosmetology and paralegal fields). These programs offer an excellent way to gain practical experience for a career.

Cost

Costs vary, but generally, since the programs are shorter in length and very focused, you get a lot of bang for the buck.

Campus Life

Like community colleges, technical schools do not generally have dorms. However, since many of the courses may be taught by people in the career or profession you're pursuing, there are built-in networking possibilities to your field of choice.

Technical Colleges