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## Lowest Cost Colleges are Hardest to Afford

Berkeley (CA) – [A new analysis of federal data](#) by the Institute for College Access & Success challenges conventional assumptions about the affordability of community colleges. Fully 80 percent of full-time community college students who applied for financial aid in 2007-08 did not get the aid they needed. About one in every four full-time college students in the U.S. attends a community college. That amounts to 2.2 million students, 250,000 more than attend private four-year colleges full time.

“Community college students are not getting the financial aid they need to make ends meet,” said Lauren Asher, the Institute’s acting president. “Lower tuition and fees do not guarantee affordability when books, housing, and other necessities typically cost thousands more than available aid.”

Limited access to important sources of aid makes community colleges no more affordable than public four-year colleges for students of modest means. Full-time community college students with financial need are much less likely to get state or college grants, subsidized work-study jobs, or federal loans than their four-year counterparts.

Four out of five full-time community college students who needed financial aid did not get enough of it to cover costs in 2007-08, the same share as in 2003-04. But four-year schools saw some improvement during that same time period. At four-year public colleges and universities, the share of students with unmet financial need went from 58 percent to 54 percent, and at private nonprofit schools, the share fell from 63 percent to 53 percent. Meanwhile, the average *amount* of unmet need for these students was the same at community colleges and public four-year colleges: their aid fell short by nearly \$5,300 in 2007-08, 20 percent more than in 2003-04.

“There is a double-standard where students at four-year colleges are expected to spend most of their time on academics, while community college students are expected to juggle their classes around their work,” said Asher. “Students at all types of colleges need to be able to focus on their studies, and they can only do that if they receive sufficient aid.”

The Institute also found that although a relatively small proportion (eight percent) of these full-time community college students take out private student loans, they were about three times as likely to miss out on federal student loans as private loan borrowers at four-year colleges. Because private loans have higher interest rates and fewer protections than federal student loans, experts agree that students should take out federal loans first. An [earlier report](#) by the Institute’s Project on Student Debt found that 10 percent of community college students attend schools that do not participate in the federal loan programs, and are therefore unable to access federal student loans. This may increase the likelihood of community college students turning to much riskier private loans.

The figures in this release were calculated by the Institute using data from the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, a federal survey of college students conducted every four years by the National Center for Education Statistics. The first data from the 2007-08 survey were released last month. The Institute’s analysis includes only full-time students who applied for federal aid.

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[See the full fact sheet about community college students and financial aid](#)

*An independent, nonprofit organization, the Institute for College Access & Success works to make higher education more available and affordable for people of all backgrounds. By conducting and supporting nonpartisan research, analysis, and advocacy, the Institute aims to improve the processes and public policies that can pave the way to successful educational outcomes for students and for society.*  
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