

RESEARCH BRIEF

COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND TRANSFER

INTRODUCTION

Community colleges are an integral part of the nation’s higher education system, and the two-year to four-year transfer path has become a more common and viable pathway to a baccalaureate degree. As students consider their postsecondary plans, secondary school counselors have an important role to play in helping students understand the opportunities available at community colleges—whether it be to prepare for a vocation through certificate/licensing, to earn an Associate’s degree, or to ultimately transfer in pursuit of a four-year degree.

NACAC included questions on its 2017–18 Counseling Trends Survey (CTS) to learn more about secondary school counselors’ attitudes about community college offerings and their preparation to discuss various topics related to community colleges and transfer with students and families. Both the CTS and NACAC’s 2017–18 Admission Trends Survey (ATS) included questions to assess any perceived stigma about community college transfer among various stakeholders, including parents/families, teachers/faculty, counselors and admission officers, and the student body.

ABOUT THE SURVEYS

Counseling Trends Survey

In May 2018, NACAC distributed the 2017–18 Counseling Trends Survey to a school counseling office staff member at 16,252 secondary schools ending in 12th grade. NACAC preference for respondents at each school started with the school counseling department chair, followed by school counselor, college placement adviser, and college adviser. The list of counselors was purchased from MCH Strategic Data. The survey was administered online using SurveyMonkey. Responses were collected through the middle of June 2018.

NACAC received 2,251 responses to the survey. The following table provides a comparison of the characteristics of NACAC CTS respondents to those of all public and private secondary schools in the US (ending in grade 12). NACAC survey respondents were 68 percent public, 18 percent private non-parochial, and 14 percent private parochial, making the sample under-representative of public schools in favor of private, non-parochial schools. Among public schools, NACAC respondents were similar to the larger population in the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch. NACAC survey respondents reported larger enrollments compared to all secondary schools.

NACAC 2017–18 Counseling Trends Survey Sample Compared to the National Secondary School Population¹

	NACAC Survey Respondents	All Secondary Schools	NACAC Public School Respondents	All Public Schools	NACAC Private Non-Parochial Respondents	All Private Non-Parochial Schools	NACAC Private Parochial Respondents	All Private Parochial Schools
N	2,251²	32,881	1,510	26,398	403	1,996	300	4,487
% of schools			68.2%	80.3%	18.2%	6.1%	13.6%	13.6%
Mean enrollment	787	570	905	650	514	214	553	286
% of students eligible for FRPL	37.3%	—	49.4	51.5	8.2%	—	12.6%	—

—Not available for private schools.

¹ Includes schools ending in grade 12.

² The number of public and private NACAC respondents does not add to the total because 38 schools did not report school type.

SOURCES: NACAC Counseling Trends Survey, 2017–18.

US Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics. (2015-16). The Elementary/Secondary Information System (EISi) web application was used to download data from the Common Core of Data (CCD) and Private School Survey (PSS) for the 2015-16 school year. Calculations performed by authors.

Admission Trends Survey

For the 2017–18 administration of the Admission Trends Survey, the questionnaire was divided into two parts—one set of questions was sent to university admission offices and another sent to institutional research (IR) offices. Both portions were administered online using SurveyMonkey. The IR survey was emailed in February 2018 to 1,266 four-year postsecondary institutions. In August 2018, the admission office survey was sent to all 1,241 four-year postsecondary institutions that were NACAC members. Admission offices also were asked to provide additional data if the IR portion had not been submitted. At the time of the survey, NACAC member institutions represented 70 percent of all degree-granting four-year, not-for-profit, baccalaureate degree-granting, Title-IV participating institutions in the US. NACAC received 493 responses, for an overall response rate of 39 percent. Of the 493 responses, 220 institutions submitted completed surveys (both admission and IR sections) and 273 submitted just the IR portion. All responses were utilized in the analyses.

NACAC 2017–18 ATS respondents had a similar average acceptance rate compared to all colleges, but private college respondents had lower yield rates when compared to the national average. NACAC survey respondents also had larger undergraduate enrollments.

NACAC 2017–18 Admission Trends Survey Sample Compared to National College Population

	NACAC Respondents	All Colleges	NACAC Public Respondents	All Public Colleges	NACAC Private Respondents	All Private Colleges
N (%)	493	1,817	184 (37%)	579 (32%)	309 (70%)	1,238 (68%)
Mean enrollment (full-time undergrad)	6,204	3,947	12,716	8,602	2,557	1,768
Mean selectivity	64.4	65.4	67.9	69.3	62.3	63.5
Mean yield	27.9	33.6	32.0	34.0	25.3	33.4

NOTE: Data for all colleges was drawn from the 2016-17 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) using the following criteria: US location, four-year, not-for-profit, baccalaureate degree-granting, and Title IV-participating. Of the 1,817 total institutions, approximately 1,567 (86 percent) provided both selectivity and yield data for fall 2016.

SOURCES: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2017–18.

US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2016-17). Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) Data Center. Washington, DC: NCES.

SURVEY RESULTS

Counselor Preparation

Survey participants were asked to indicate how prepared they feel to discuss specific topics with students and families on a scale from “not at all prepared” to “very prepared.” In general, counselors felt at least “moderately prepared” to discuss each of the topics included in the survey, and they were the most prepared to discuss the process of applying to/enrolling in community college. However, fewer than forty percent felt very prepared about important topics such as local community college transfer policies and for-profit college comparisons.

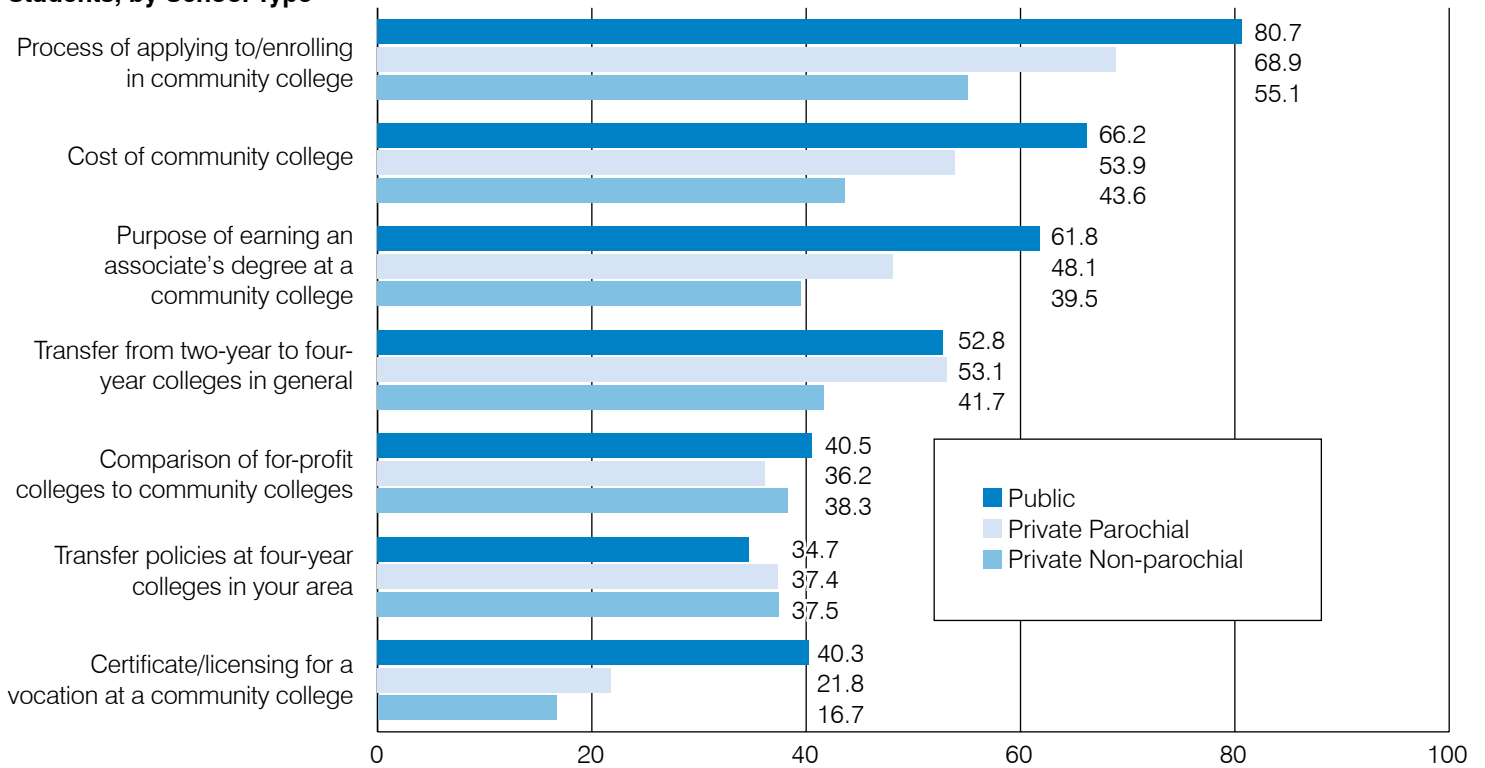
Counselors’ Self-Reported Preparation to Discuss Various Community College/Transfer Topics with Students

	Very Prepared	Moderately Prepared	Slightly Prepared	Not at All Prepared
Process of applying to/enrolling in community college	74.6	18.5	5.4	1.6
Cost of community college	60.5	28.5	9.1	1.8
Purpose of earning an Associate’s degree at a community college	55.9	31.8	9.7	2.5
Transfer from two-year to four-year colleges in general	50.8	36.2	10.6	2.4
Comparison of for-profit colleges to community colleges	39.5	32.7	19.9	8.0
Transfer policies at four-year colleges in your area	35.7	41.1	18.0	5.2
Certificate/licensing for a vocation at a community college	7.7	20.0	38.8	33.6

Differences by School Characteristics

With a few exceptions, counselors at public schools were more likely than their private school counterparts to report being very prepared to discuss issues related to community colleges and transfer.

Percentage of Counselors Reporting They are “Very Prepared” to Discuss Community College/Transfer Topics with Students, by School Type



Counselors’ Self-Reported Preparation to Discuss Various Community College/Transfer Topics with Students, by School Type

	Very Prepared	Moderately Prepared	Slightly Prepared	Not at All Prepared
Process of applying to/enrolling in community college				
Public	80.7	15.6	2.8	0.9
Private Parochial	68.9	22.4	7.9	0.8
Private Non-parochial	55.1	26.9	13.3	4.6
Cost of community college				
Public	66.2	26.4	6.3	1.0
Private Parochial	53.9	32.1	12.8	1.2
Private Non-parochial	43.6	34.0	16.8	5.6
Purpose of earning an associate’s degree at a community college				
Public	61.8	31.9	5.3	1.1
Private Parochial	48.1	32.5	16.5	2.9
Private Non-parochial	39.5	30.9	21.6	8.0
Transfer from two-year to four-year colleges in general				
Public	52.8	36.8	9.0	1.5
Private Parochial	53.1	28.8	16.0	2.1
Private Non-parochial	41.7	38.9	13.0	6.5

continued

	Very Prepared	Moderately Prepared	Slightly Prepared	Not at All Prepared
Comparison of for-profit colleges to community colleges				
Public	40.5	34.0	19.9	5.6
Private Parochial	36.2	29.6	23.9	10.3
Private Non-parochial	38.3	29.9	16.7	15.1
Transfer policies at four-year colleges in your area				
Public	34.7	43.1	17.6	4.6
Private Parochial	37.4	34.2	23.0	5.3
Private Non-parochial	37.5	39.0	16.1	7.4
Certificate/licensing for a vocation at a community college				
Public	40.3	41.4	16.1	2.3
Private Parochial	21.8	37.9	28.0	12.3
Private Non-parochial	16.7	29.3	28.7	25.3

Counselors with larger percentages of students eligible for free and reduced price lunch—a proxy for socioeconomic status—reported higher levels of preparation to discuss certificate/licensing for a vocation at a community college (Spearman correlation = .240, $p < .01$).

School-Based Support for Community College Advising

NACAC also asked survey respondents to report on school or school district level activities and support structures that could contribute positively to community college/transfer advising. These included professional development for counselors, frequency of communication between the counseling office and community college admission staff, and opportunities for students and families to connect with local community colleges through school-based functions.

Percentage of Counselors who Received Professional Development on Advising Students for Community College Enrollment

	In Past 12 Months	In Past 3 Years
All Survey Respondents	40.9	55.1
by School Type		
Public	49.8	63.9
Private Parochial	28.2	46.4
Private Non-parochial	16.5	28.5
by Free and Reduced Price Lunch		
0 to 25% of students	34.9	48.8
26 to 50%	48.1	26.6
51 to 75%	46.5	59.0
76 to 100%	52.9	63.9

Correlation (Spearman) between percentage of students receiving free and reduced price lunch receiving professional development: past 12 months (.191, $p < .01$); past 3 years (.167, $p < .01$)

How Often Counselors Report Communicating Directly with Community College Admission Staff

	Frequently	Occasionally	Infrequently	Never
All Survey Respondents	37.4	35.8	18.0	8.8
by School Type				
Public	49.0	36.5	11.1	3.4
Private Parochial	16.1	43.8	26.0	14.0
Private Non-parochial	9.3	26.9	38.3	25.6
by Free and Reduced Price Lunch				
0 to 25% of students	22.0	39.8	26.1	12.1
26 to 50%	53.6	33.1	10.0	3.3
51 to 75%	51.7	36.2	9.6	2.6
76 to 100%	51.1	31.7	11.8	5.3

Correlation (Spearman) between percentage of students receiving free and reduced price lunch and frequency of communication (.363, $p < .01$)

Percentage of Schools (or School Districts) that Offer Opportunities for Students and Families to Connect with Local Community Colleges through School-Based Functions

All Survey Respondents	69.7
by School Type	
Public	83.0
Private Parochial	57.0
Private Non-parochial	28.3
by Enrollment	
Fewer than 500 students	63.9
501 to 999	65.7
1,000 to 1,499	78.1
1,500 to 1,999	86.3
2,000 or more	91.9
by Free and Reduced Price Lunch	
0 to 25% of students	57.8
26 to 50%	82.1
51 to 75%	83.0
76 to 100%	86.5

Correlation (Spearman) between offering school-based functions and: enrollment (.175, $p < .01$); percentage of students receiving free and reduced price lunch (.336, $p < .01$)

Counselor Attitudes

Survey participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with various statements about community colleges as a means of gauging general attitudes about the value of community college programs and the ease of enrollment and transfer. A large majority of respondents strongly agreed that community colleges offer relatively easy application and enrollment processes, strong vocational/technical programs, and cost savings for a Bachelor’s degree. However, most counselors reported less positive attitudes about the academic rigor of community college coursework and the ease of transfer to four-year colleges.

Counselors at public schools were much more likely to strongly agree that community colleges offer rigorous academic coursework when compared to their private school counterparts.

Counselors’ Level of Agreement/Disagreement with Various Statements about the Educational Offerings of Community Colleges

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Community colleges offer rigorous academic coursework for students interested in pursuing postsecondary education.	36.5	48.9	10.7	3.9
Community colleges offer strong vocational/technical programs for students who would like to train for a career after high school.	71.5	22.6	1.9	4.0
Community colleges offer cost savings to students who would like to pursue a Bachelor’s degree.	80.1	14.8	1.2	3.9
It is relatively easy to transfer from a community college to a four-year college.	48.1	41.7	6.8	3.4
It is relatively easy to apply to/enroll in community college.	82.4	12.8	1.0	3.8

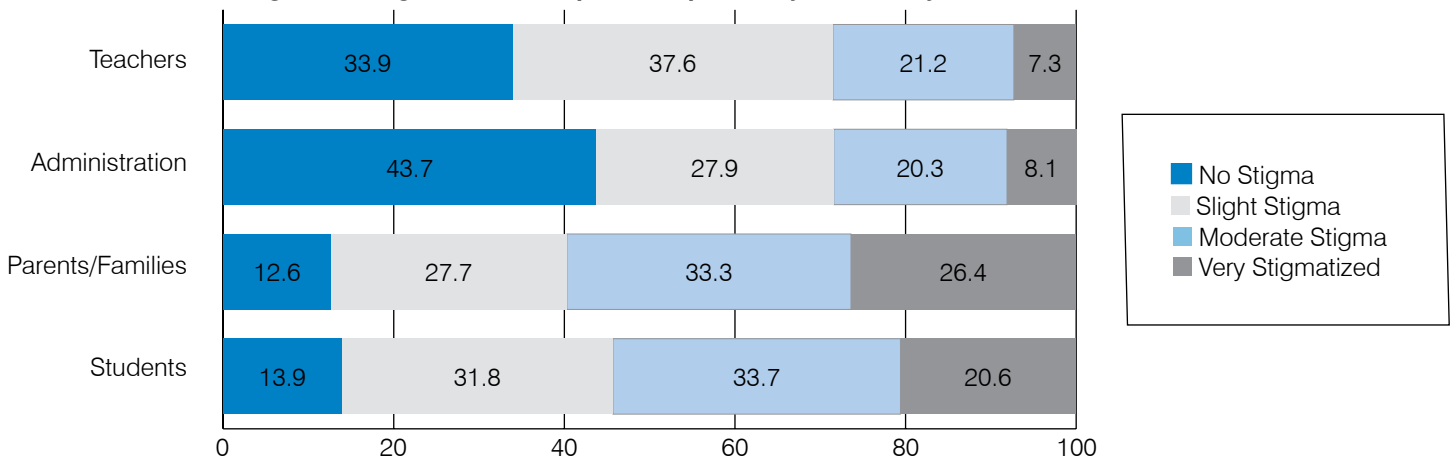
Counselors' Level of Agreement/Disagreement with Various Statements about the Educational Offerings of Community Colleges, by School Type

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Community colleges offer rigorous academic coursework for students interested in pursuing postsecondary education.				
Public	42.4	45.6	7.4	4.7
Private Parochial	22.6	57.9	17.3	2.2
Private Non-parochial	24.6	53.8	19.2	2.5
Community colleges offer strong vocational/technical programs for students who would like to train for a career after high school.				
Public	72.1	20.9	2.2	4.8
Private Parochial	73.1	23.8	1.2	1.9
Private Non-parochial	65.6	29.9	1.7	2.9
It is relatively easy to transfer from a community college to a four-year college.				
Public	49.4	41.4	5.2	4.0
Private Parochial	48.9	38.4	10.8	1.9
Private Non-parochial	39.6	48.3	10.0	2.1

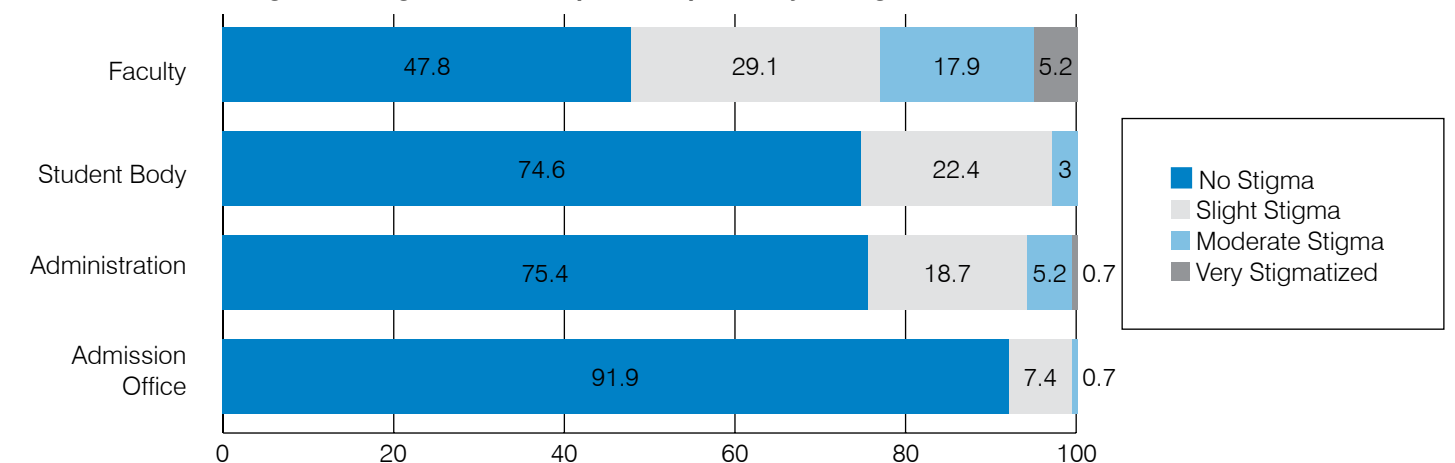
Stigma About Community College Transfer

Respondents to each of the NACAC surveys (CTS and ATS) were asked to indicate the level of any stigma they perceived toward community college/transfer among various stakeholders at their schools and colleges. At secondary schools, counselors perceived that parents/families and students were the most likely to carry a stigma related to community colleges and transfer. College admission office respondents reported that faculty were most likely to stigmatize transfer from community colleges.

Level of Perceived Stigma Among Various Groups, as Reported by Secondary School Counselors



Level of Perceived Stigma Among Various Groups, as Reported by College Admission Officers



Differences by School/College Characteristics

The highest levels of stigma were reported at private, non-parochial schools. Counselors at more than half of private, non-parochial schools indicated that community college transfer was very stigmatized among parents/families (61 percent) and students (53 percent). Nearly one-quarter (24 percent) of survey respondents from private, non-parochial schools reported that community college transfer was very stigmatized among the administration, compared to only 10 percent of private, parochial schools and four percent of public schools.

Among each stakeholder group, a larger percentage of students receiving free or reduced price lunch was associated with less stigma related to community college transfer.

Secondary School Students

	Very Stigmatized	Moderate Stigma	Slight Stigma	No Stigma
Control				
Public	9.6	33.5	38.3	18.5
Private Parochial	33.6	41.1	22.4	2.9
Private Non-parochial	53.3	28.8	13.6	4.3
Free and Reduced Lunch				
0 to 25% of students	35.5	39.1	21.4	4.1
26 to 50%	7.9	33.3	42.6	16.2
51 to 75%	5.2	28.0	41.3	25.5
76 to 100%	7.7	27.6	37.9	26.8

Correlation (Spearman) between percentage of students receiving free and reduced price lunch and level of stigma (-.435, $p < .01$)

Secondary School Parents/Families

	Very Stigmatized	Moderate Stigma	Slight Stigma	No Stigma
Control				
Public	14.2	35.3	33.9	16.7
Private Parochial	43.2	34.4	19.1	3.3
Private Non-parochial	61.3	24.5	10.2	4.0
Free and Reduced Lunch				
0 to 25% of students	43.9	37.4	15.4	3.2
26 to 50%	12.2	36.8	37.2	13.8
51 to 75%	9.2	28.4	40.2	22.1
76 to 100%	8.8	26.1	37.2	28.0

Correlation (Spearman) between percentage of students receiving free and reduced price lunch and level of stigma (-.473, $p < .01$)

Secondary School Administration

	Very Stigmatized	Moderate Stigma	Slight Stigma	No Stigma
Control				
Public	3.6	14.6	28.3	53.4
Private Parochial	9.5	27.4	33.2	29.9
Private Non-parochial	24.0	37.4	22.7	15.9
Free and Reduced Lunch				
0 to 25% of students	11.9	26.1	30.0	32.0
26 to 50%	4.3	13.8	27.7	54.2
51 to 75%	4.1	12.2	28.4	55.4
76 to 100%	5.0	14.6	26.9	53.5

Correlation (Spearman) between percentage of students receiving free and reduced price lunch and level of stigma (-.263, $p < .01$)

Secondary School Teachers

	Very Stigmatized	Moderate Stigma	Slight Stigma	No Stigma
Control				
Public	3.6	16.6	39.1	40.7
Private Parochial	7.1	27.1	40.8	25.0
Private Non-parochial	22.0	34.7	28.8	14.6
Free and Reduced Lunch				
0 to 25% of students	10.9	26.5	38.8	23.9
26 to 50%	4.3	15.8	38.9	41.1
51 to 75%	3.3	15.9	37.6	43.2
76 to 100%	3.5	18.1	32.8	45.6

Correlation (Spearman) between percentage of students receiving free and reduced price lunch and level of stigma (-.244, $p < .01$)