



CCBA Essay Contest Winner

CCBA sponsored this contest to find out what students think about community colleges offering baccalaureate college degrees on their campuses, the challenges of finding degree programs close to their homes and obstacles students must overcome in order to earn a baccalaureate degree.

The winner is:

John Windham

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Tucson, AZ



Imagine a Four-Year Community College.

Imagine four-year institutions that allow for a pace and schedule that meet the needs of nontraditional students with non-scholastic obligations. Imagine institutions with an affordability that allows students to pay their own tuition as it comes due, in the absence of family wealth or large scholarships. Imagine colleges that take pride in their program and the philosophy of open admissions, rather than their ability to selectively admit few while turning down many. Imagine institutions like these all over the country, allowing continuity of family, work, and community between students and their hometowns. You have just imagined community colleges with four-year degree programs.

A large concept of community colleges is to tailor to students with small sporadic amounts of time available for classes. I work, help run a non-profit honor society on campus, attend full time classes, and am a cadet in the Corona de Tucson Firefighter Academy. Without the flexible schedule that Pima Community College affords me, I would be unable to complete all of these tasks simultaneously. Community colleges generally have very accommodating schedules, with courses available nights and weekends, self-paced on campus, and even online. Students who deserve and desire to complete a bachelor's degree may simply not have the availability to schedule classes between 7 A.M. and 5 P.M. Monday through Friday at a prestigious university, but even those with open schedules cannot always afford these universities.

It is no coincidence that many students attending community colleges fall in the category of working poor. During freshman year, I struggled to pay tuition and book expenses; it was a year before I began receiving scholarships. Working in the food service industry, funds were tight; luckily I was able to utilize the library's books on reserve when I could not pay for my own. I saved thousands of dollars attending Pima Community College compared to what the University of Arizona would have charged me for the same number of credits. Yet my situation is not unique; millions of students would love to attend lavish universities, but incurring debts or failing to receive competitive scholarships deter worthy students from acquiring higher education. This is not to mention the fact that some full-capacity universities turn down valedictorians simply because they receive more perfect applications than they have seats available.

Sometimes students need more than simply tuition or flexibility to attend college, they need something nearby. Community colleges are exactly what the name entails, institutions of the community. Pima Community College has six campuses around town and online courses available. This has given me the ability to live with my sister and help her with mortgage payments while attending school. The community emphasis of these colleges allows students to stay in and help their community, family and friends while pursuing higher education and personal enrichment. To imagine a solution to a problem and make it a reality is a staple of college education. Many have imagined a four-year community college—it must become a reality.