The Top Five Reasons to Enroll at a Community College

Sept. 24, 2013

Alicia Roberson
Public Relations Writer
aliciaroberson@triton.edu
Students who graduate from high school are oftentimes faced with the choice of whether to attend a community college or four-year university. While the prospect of leaving home is an exciting step students are eager to make, when you factor in the financial cost to attend a four-year school – which can include room and board – and a student’s level of college readiness, enrolling in a university straight out of high school may not be the right next step for everyone.

Beginning one’s higher education at a community college can be valuable in preparing students academically, financially and mentally to transfer to a university. But how can a student know if attending a community college is the right path to take? Triton College sought the advice of its students to develop the top five reasons students decide to enroll at a community college. Their reasons may echo the sentiments of other students who are considering this academic option to jump-start their road to higher education.

**Reason #5:** Small class sizes

Students appreciate that community colleges often have fewer students per class compared to four-year institutions. Many classes are similar in size to what students are familiar with from their high school classes. Smaller class sizes allow students to receive more individualized support from instructors that can benefit their studies. Plus, students are more likely to interact with other students in class when there are fewer people competing for attention. Research data released in 2011 by Harvard University show that smaller class sizes can increase the likelihood that students will be successful in their career life.¹

**HOW TRITON MEASURES UP:** Triton College enrolls thousands of students each semester, yet the college’s average class size is only 20.4 students – well under the hundreds of students seated in a typical university lecture hall! Triton’s faculty is highly-credentialed and uniquely brings real-world experience in their fields to the classroom. This gives students the added motivation to work hard toward their career and educational goals.

Triton student Ryan Kennedy feels more comfortable and confident and finds it easier to participate in a class with no more than 30 students. “Being in a small class setting enables me to have one-on-one help from instructors when I need it, which helps me to fully grasp the material,” he said. “Plus when there are less people, there are fewer distractions and more opportunities to excel in class.”

Good things come in small packages; and the smaller campus size most community colleges support can greatly benefit a student’s success. For many students, the college community becomes an additional support system outside of home with people who encourage them to succeed and provide the necessary tools to help. Students also are more likely to form a connection with faculty, staff, peers and the college’s resources in a smaller, close-knit setting.

Building a connection with the college by joining clubs and organizations and seeking out resources to help with their schooling is a natural and positive outcome of interacting with faculty and fellow students. This also shows that students are taking pride in their education!

**HOW TRITON MEASURES UP:** While students come to Triton for their education, many have found fun and much needed encouragement to complete their studies by participating in on-campus clubs and organizations. They make new friends and discover an outlet to voice their opinions, assist in their schooling, and/or showcase their creativity.

To support students, Triton offers a staff-to-student mentoring program, called TEAM, where Triton’s staff and faculty members serve as mentors to incoming students. In its first year, the program has seen a retention rate of 88 percent of student TEAM participants from fall 2012 to spring 2013.

Triton College student Amanda Schultz, who has cerebral palsy, was unsure about what her college experience would be like. She was nervous that people would make fun of her condition. But when she participated in on-campus activities and sought the help of the college’s tutoring centers, she made friends quickly and developed a healthy support system. “Knowing that I had that extra help available is what kept me going and helped me achieve success,” she said.

**Reason #3:** To “test the waters”

Many students aren’t initially sure about the academic area they’d like to pursue following high school. And attending a university can be a costly mistake for students who are still finding their way or decide to change majors after already taking several courses for a different degree. Students who are undecided can save time and money by beginning their higher education at a community college. With many degree and certificate programs available, community colleges offer flexibility for students to figure out where their interest and talent lies before transferring to a university and declaring a major.

Students can also save both time and money by taking their general education courses at a community college and transferring the credit hours to a university, as most community colleges offer easily transferable credit hours.

By completing the required general education courses at a community college before enrolling at a university, students can concentrate on the courses they need for their degree once they get there.

**HOW TRITON MEASURES UP:** From Hospitality to Criminal Justice to Nursing to Early Childhood Education, with more than 100 degree and certificate programs, Triton provides a plethora of options for students to “test the waters” to figure out what they’d like to pursue. Plus, the college is continually adding new programs that reflect the evolving workforce. Web and Social Media, Robotics, IT and Environmental Sustainability, to name a few, are some of the most recent additions to Triton’s curriculum.

Student Tina Fajardo was undecided about the field of study she wanted to pursue. So instead of attending a university, she enrolled at Triton College and was able to try various
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courses before finding an area she enjoyed. “I tried graphic design and computer programming, but neither field was for me,” Fujardo said. “Right now, I’m taking several classes in social work and really enjoy it. I’m glad I was able to figure out what I’m passionate about because it makes the learning process more fulfilling.”

Not all high school graduates are financially, academically or mentally prepared to attend a four-year institution; others have responsibilities at home they can’t leave behind. But pursuing a higher education doesn’t have to send a student far from home with a community college in close proximity. Community colleges provide students with the option of staying in their familiar surroundings and near their most important support system – family and friends – while still offering a quality education at an affordable price. By beginning their higher education at a community college, students are able to better prepare for the increased difficulty and workload of college-level coursework, as well as the cost of attending a university and the change in surroundings associated with a four-year school.

**HOW TRITON MEASURES UP:** Triton College proudly serves the communities of Bellwood, Berkeley, Broadview, Brookfield, Elmwood Park, Forest Park, Franklin Park, Harwood Heights, Hillside, Hines, LaGrange Park, Maywood, Melrose Park, Norridge, North Riverside, Northlake, Norwood Park, Oak Park, River Forest, River Grove, Riverside, Rosemont, Schiller Park, Stone Park and Westchester – a combined total district population of more than 315,000 residents!

There’s nothing like being close to home for Westchester native and Triton College student Jennifer Jackson. “I enjoy having easy and quick access to the school from my home so that if an emergency arises at home, I’m not too far that I can’t take care of it,” said Jackson, who is pursuing a degree in general education studies. “And also, I get to be where I’m most comfortable and still get my education.”

**Reason #1: Affordability**

Saving money is the number one reason students choose to enroll in a community college – and for good reason! Community colleges offer the affordability many students need to finance their education – oftentimes without seeking assistance from a loan. According to the *National Center for Education Statistics, the average annual tuition rates (including room and board) for full-time undergraduate students at degree-granting institutions was recorded at $8,085 for a two-year public institution from 2010-2011, compared to $15,918 for a four-year public institution and $32,617 for a four-year private institution.* This comparison shows the important role community colleges play in providing a low cost alternative for students to pursue a higher education.

And because community colleges also offer financial assistance in the forms of scholarships, work-study programs, grants and more, students can really save their money, before transferring to a university.

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HOW TRITON MEASURES UP: Triton’s tuition from 2010-2011 was $88 per semester hour for in-district students and $232.20 for out-of-district students. Here comes the math: In 2010-2011, if an in-district student took 12 semester hours (the amount needed to be determined as a full-time student at Triton) each semester (fall 2010 and spring 2011), overall tuition would have been $2,112. That’s a savings of $13,806 as compared to a public four-year institution, and a savings of $30,505 compared to a private four-year!

Triton’s current fall 2013 tuition for in-district students is $103 per semester hour and $268.80 for out-of-district students.

Triton graduate Andréa Jones, a double major in political science and vocal performance, turned to Triton after losing a loan that left her unable to afford the tuition at a four-year university. “Triton afforded me the opportunity to continue my education and has prepared me for the professional world,” she said. Jones, who graduated in 2012, currently attends a four-year school out of state where she is furthering her education for a career in law. Now that’s money well spent!

For students and parents who’d like to learn more about what a community college has to offer, they can contact the Triton College Admissions Department to meet with a counselor, schedule a campus tour, or obtain information about community college enrollment. Call (708) 456-0300, Ext. 3130, or visit www.triton.edu.

**For media inquires, contact Alicia Roberson, Public Relations Writer, at (708) 456-0300, ext. 3608, or email aroberso@triton.edu.**

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ABOUT TRITON COLLEGE

Triton College is one of the nation’s premier two-year institutions of higher education dedicated to student success. Located 14 miles from downtown Chicago, in River Grove, the school offers close to 100 degree and certificate programs at its 100-acre campus that features a comfortable, friendly and diverse atmosphere. More than 15,000 students enroll at Triton each year to take advantage of Triton’s small, accessible classes, qualified faculty, affordability and financial assistance. Triton College is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission; member, North Central Association. [http://www.triton.edu](http://www.triton.edu)