Joliet Junior College, the oldest community college in the nation, was founded in 1901. Since then, community colleges have become increasingly important for the U.S. education and training system. Today, 11.5 million students (6.5 million of whom are credit students) are enrolled in almost 1,200 community colleges, according to the American Association of Community Colleges. Of all U.S. undergraduates, community college students constitute a remarkable 46 percent.1

The original goal of two-year colleges was to prepare students, through an associate’s degree program, to transfer to a four-year college. Over time, the purpose evolved to include work force training programs, schooling toward certification in areas such as nursing and other professions, and adult continuing education classes. Lately, some community colleges have started to offer bachelor’s degrees in a number of fields. However, there are big differences across states in how the community college system is used. Economist Cecilia Elena Rouse found evidence suggesting that states tend to focus their resources on either a community college or a four-year college system. California has the largest network of the former, with 66 percent of the state’s current undergraduates attending community colleges. Nevada and Vermont have only 16 percent of their undergraduates in community colleges.2 Among the states within the Eighth District, Illinois and Mississippi have the largest proportion of undergraduates—about half—in community colleges. Indiana has the lowest percentage—19 percent. Table 1 summarizes enrollment and other relevant statistics for the Eighth District.

Advantages of Community Colleges
Compared with a traditional four-year college, a community college has several important advantages for students. To begin, the open admission policy makes it easier to enroll regardless of prior academic record. The cost to attend community college is also less because of lower tuition and other fees than what four-year colleges charge. Community college students on average paid $2,017 in tuition and fees for the 2006–07 academic year, which is less than half of what students in public four-year universities paid ($5,685) and only about one-tenth of the tuition and fees for students in private four-year universities ($20,492), according to the U.S. Department of Education. In addition, most community college students live at home, thus saving room and board expenses incurred by students at other institutions. Finally, community colleges offer a more flexible curriculum, and their schedule includes evening and weekend classes. That gives students an opportunity to attend college while working.

Community College Students
The population of community college students is diverse and is different from the population at four-year colleges. Community college students are 60 percent white, 15 percent black, 14 percent Hispanic and...
lege students have parents with a high school
In contrast, only 27 percent of four-year col-
with only a high school education or less.
first-generation college students than are
community college students work full-time,
year colleges. Furthermore, 40.8 percent of
students attending community colleges are
so-called nontraditional students than four-
students from a four-year institution without
transfer to a four-year college. One
of students entering community college
students retain a formal community college
certification in a certain field. Some intend
plan to obtain an associate's degree, some
they enter college. Although many of them
2.5/4.0 GPA at that institution.
• developing a procedure for evaluating
• making available facilities and services
• establishing clear guidelines and mea

Not surprisingly, most community col-
planning for a post-secondary education,
and nontraditional students attending four-
students have access to higher education, which makes overall
educational attainment in society higher.
To better answer a question about the
effect of community colleges on educa-
tional attainment, it is necessary to consider
students' intentions toward their educational
objectives together with their outcomes. The
problem is a lack of reliable data that
measures students' goals and preparation.
The U.S. Department of Education is among those that attempted to study educa-
tional outcomes of community college students.
Its report used data from several
institutions, including and mentoring service for students
programming and adult literacy training, and
technical schools to create a counsel-
ing and mentoring for service students
as well as an apprenticeship/internship
program. Missouri students have plans to attend community college for Almost Nothing
The study found that about 90 percent
of students entering community college
intended to obtain a formal certification
or to transfer to a four-year college. One
could argue that it is more reasonable to
consider completion rates only for those
who intended to obtain a degree in the first
place, and another group had completed
63 percent (depending on data
used) of these students had fulfilled their
expectations within 6-8 years after initial
enrollment. In particular, about 11 percent
had earned a certificate, 17-18 percent had
earned an associate's degree, 11-12 percent
(depending on data used) had attained a bachelor's degree or higher, and 12-13 per-
cent had transferred to a four-year college
without attaining a formal degree.
In keeping mind in people that one of the main
goals of two-year colleges is to prepare
students for continuing their studies at four-
year institutions, it is important to evaluate their
transfer rates. The U.S. Education Department report indicated that,
overall, about 29 percent of community
college students had transferred to four-year colleges.
Interestingly, 31 percent of those
who intended to complete a bachelor's degree when they first started had trans-
ferred before earning a bachelor's degree.
Sixty percent of those who did transfer either
obtained a bachelor's degree or were still working toward it.
What about the students who left com-
munity college without any formal creden-
tial? This amounts to more than half of
them. According to the report, about one-
third of this group of students during the
year college might lower educational attainment for some students, more students have access
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TABLE 1
Comparisons for the eighth district

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Enrollment in community colleges, fall 2005</th>
<th>Percent of students, fall 2005</th>
<th>Four-year public (in-state)</th>
<th>Four-year private</th>
<th>Two-year public</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average tuition and required fees 2006-07</td>
<td>$6,184,000</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>$6,894</td>
<td>$20,492</td>
<td>$2,017</td>
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<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>4,428</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>$5,550</td>
<td>$16,817</td>
<td>$2,534</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>66,298</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>$4,457</td>
<td>$12,300</td>
<td>$1,709</td>
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<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>74,829</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>$5,009</td>
<td>$17,576</td>
<td>$2,474</td>
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<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>352,824</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>$8,038</td>
<td>$20,181</td>
<td>$2,252</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics
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