
Special Report



Washington Research Council

June 11, 1999

Washington's Community and Technical Colleges

Two-year community colleges are an American invention. Originally called "junior colleges," the first to open was Chicago's Joliet Junior College, in 1901. By the end of the First World War, 46 junior colleges, with 4,500 students, dotted the nation.

"The people's colleges," as they been called, serve as the doorway to higher education for many Americans seeking training beyond high school in academic and vocational subjects. In the fall of 1996, according to the U.S. Department Education, nearly half of all students enrolled in a public institution of higher education were attending community colleges.

In that year, Washington almost equalled California as the state with the highest percentage of students attending two-year colleges – 68 percent in Washington, 69 percent in California.

Today, Washington's community colleges number 27. A new one, Cascadia Community College, in Bothell, is slated to open in the fall of next year. Washington also supports five technical colleges. The state's system of two-year colleges is run by the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC).

Tuition at these colleges is relatively low. State residents paid \$1,515 to enroll full-time during 1998-99. For the most needy students, who are eligible for a State Need Grant, the colleges have been essentially tuition free.

In view of the importance of higher education to the Evergreen State, the Washington Research Council here presents an overview of our community and technical colleges.

Briefly

Two-year colleges, an American invention, contribute greatly to the academic and occupational training needs of thousands of students in Washington. The first one in this state opened in Everett in 1915, but closed eight years later for want of students. Today, Washington is home to 27 community colleges. In the fall of 1998, more than 242,000 students signed up for courses.

History

“In 1932, the Carnegie Foundation issued an influential report on higher education in California, home to more than a third of the nation’s junior college students. The report urged junior colleges to recognize that relatively few of their students actually transferred to universities.”

University of Chicago president William Rainey Harper was the first to promote the idea of two-year colleges, in the 1890s. He believed that the subject matter covered during the university freshman and sophomore years was simply an extension of high-school work. During Harper’s tenure, the University of Chicago divided its curriculum into lower and upper divisions, called junior and senior colleges. He urged local high schools to offer college level courses, with the prospect that their students could be admitted directly to the University’s senior college

True to Harper’s vision, the course offerings of the first junior colleges focused on preparing students to transfer to a four-year college.

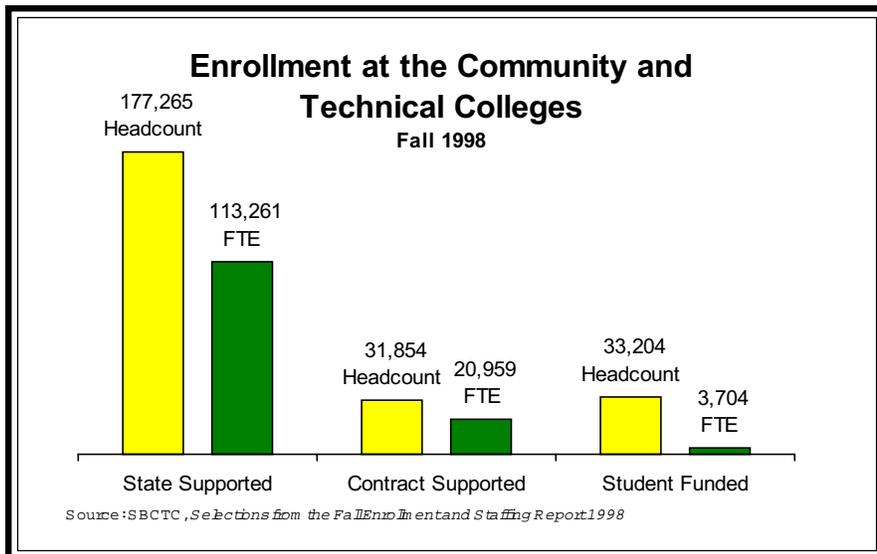
In 1932, the Carnegie Foundation issued an influential report on higher education in California, home to more than a third of the nation’s junior college students. The report urged junior colleges to recognize that relatively few of their students actually transferred to universities. It argued that the junior colleges’ curricula should stress “community education for a general civilized life” instead of preparation for transfer. The report also argued that the colleges should expand their offerings of vocational courses.

Junior colleges everywhere accepted the broader mandate. In the 1950s, the schools began calling themselves “community colleges,” reflecting their many educational activities, which ranged from occupational programs to adult education. The name change hit Washington in 1961.

In the 1960s, community college enrollments in Washington soared as the state strove to meet the higher-education needs of the Baby-Boomers. During that decade, the number of community colleges in Washington grew from 10 to 25, and enrollment mushroomed from 10,886 students to 108,679.

Washington’s first junior colleges were locally funded and administered. The state began funding the colleges in 1941. The state community college system was formally created in 1967. The five technical colleges were brought into the system in 1991.

CHART 1



Enrollment

Chart 1 shows fall-quarter 1998 enrollment at the community and technical colleges (CTCs). The chart numbers students by headcount and full-time equivalents.

The headcount enrollment consists of the number of students who enrolled for at least one fall course. The full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment is calculated by

summing the total number of credit-hours students signed up for, and then dividing the sum by 15, since 15 quarterly hours constitutes a full load.

The headcount enrollment for fall 1998 was upward of 242,000 students, and FTE enrollment was nearly 138,000.

Students fell into one of three categories. The vast majority of students were *state supported*. Legislative appropriations to the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges covered about three-quarters of the cost of educating these students, tuition about one-quarter.

The number of state-supported students is capped by the legislature, and most legislative discussions about the level of CTC enrollments focus on the number of these students. In the fall of 1988, state-supported students comprised 73 percent of headcount enrollment, 82 percent of FTE.

Thirteen percent of headcount enrollment and 15 percent of FTE were *contract supported*. The colleges received funding for these students through contracts with other organizations. In some cases the contracting organizations were private, for example businesses obtaining customized training for their workers. In other cases the contracting organizations were public agencies like school districts and the state Department of Corrections.

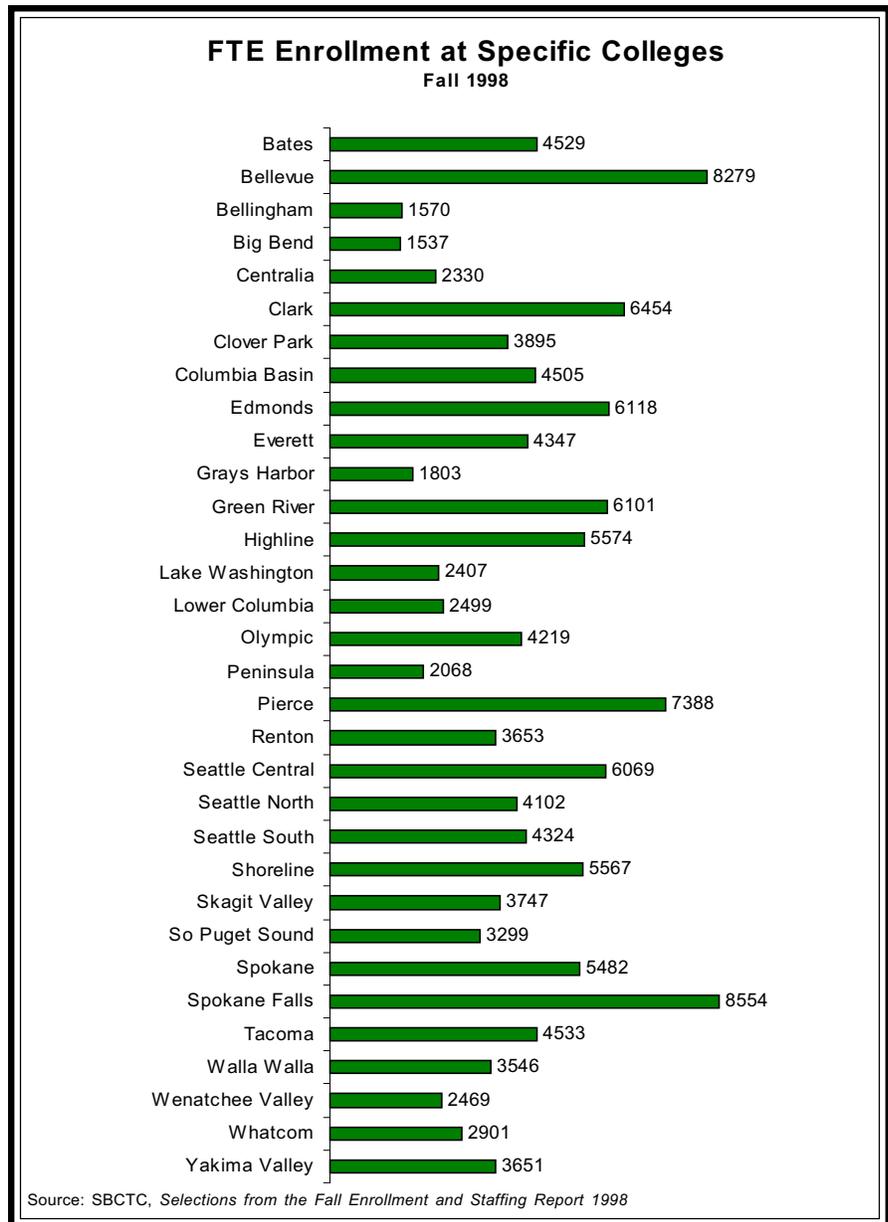
Fourteen percent of headcount enrollment and 3 percent of FTE were *student funded*. These students took continuing-education courses and paid the entire cost of the courses with tuition.

Enrollment by school

Chart 2 shows the distribution of fall 1998 enrollments across the 32 community and technical colleges. With 8,554 students, Spokane Falls Community College led the pack. With 1,537 students, Big Bend Community College brought up the rear.

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CHART 2



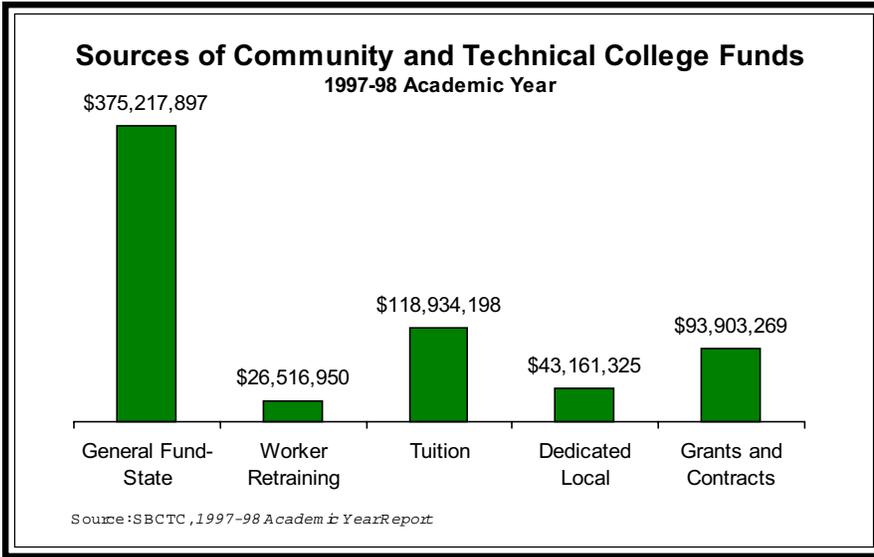


CHART 3

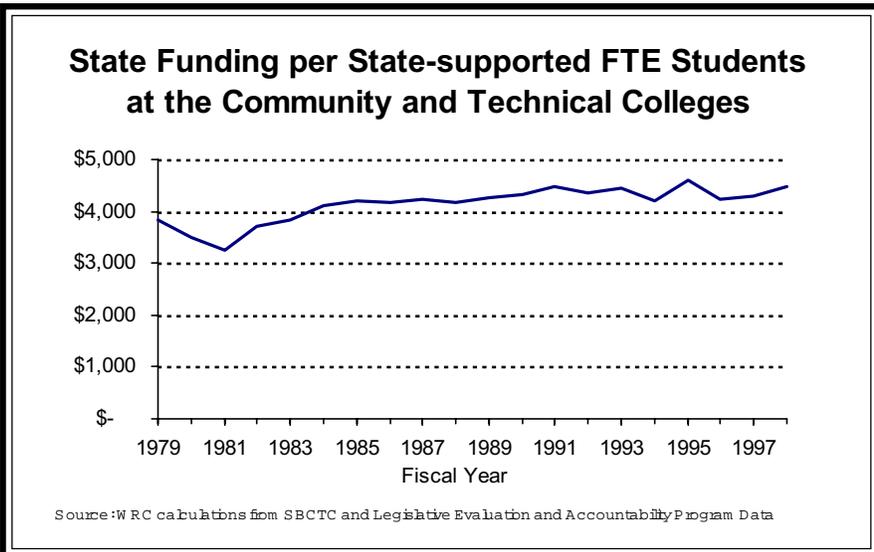
“Tuition is about to go up again. The legislature has authorized the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges to increase tuition by up to 4.6 percent for 1999-2000 and 3.6 percent for 2000-01.”

Tuition paid by state-supported students accounted for 18 percent of the total, grants and contracts for 14 percent, local funds for 7 percent. (Local funds include student tuition for continuing education courses and lab fees for some courses.)

Chart 4 shows per-FTE state funding for the 19-year period from 1979-80 through 1997-98. The numbers are inflation-adjusted to the fiscal 1998 price level. Per-student funding grew from about \$3,500 to almost \$4,500 during the period. Most of the growth occurred before 1990-91.

Although inflation-adjusted appropriations grew during the period, the growth in tuition was greater. As a result, the share of costs born by students increased. Tuition was 12 percent of per-student funding in 1979-80; it rose to 23 percent in 1997-98. But needy students have been supported by more financial aid. (See the Research Council’s special report *Trends in Higher Education Finance*.)

CHART 4



CTC funding

For the 1997-98 academic year state appropriations, tuition and other sources of funds supplied the CTCs with a total of \$657.7 million for operations.

Of that total, 60 percent flowed from state appropriations — \$375.2 million from the state general fund and \$26.5 million from the state employment and training trust fund.

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Students who live in Washington pay less for tuition than nonresident students do. For 1998-99, resident students paid \$1,515, nonresidents \$5,961. Resident tuition was 2 percent below the national average, nonresident 35 percent above, according to a Higher Education Coordinating Board survey.

Enrollment caps

During the early 1980s, CTC enrollments had increased significantly at a time when recession slashed state tax revenue. Beginning with the 1982-83 school year, the state capped community college enrollments. Under the current system, the legislature sets a two-year college FTE enrollment target and appropriates funding for it.

Colleges may exceed the target, but they will receive no more money from the state. They must fund the additional students solely with tuition payments. During 1983-91, community-college enrollments averaged within 1 percent of the targets. But in recent years, although the legislature budgeted for enrollment increases, the colleges greatly exceeded the targets, as shown in Chart 5.

Budgeted enrollment continues to rise. The legislature has funded FTE enrollment increases of 2,003 for 1999-2000, and 2,803 for 2000-01. (The latter increase includes 800 FTEs at the new school, Cascadia Community College.)

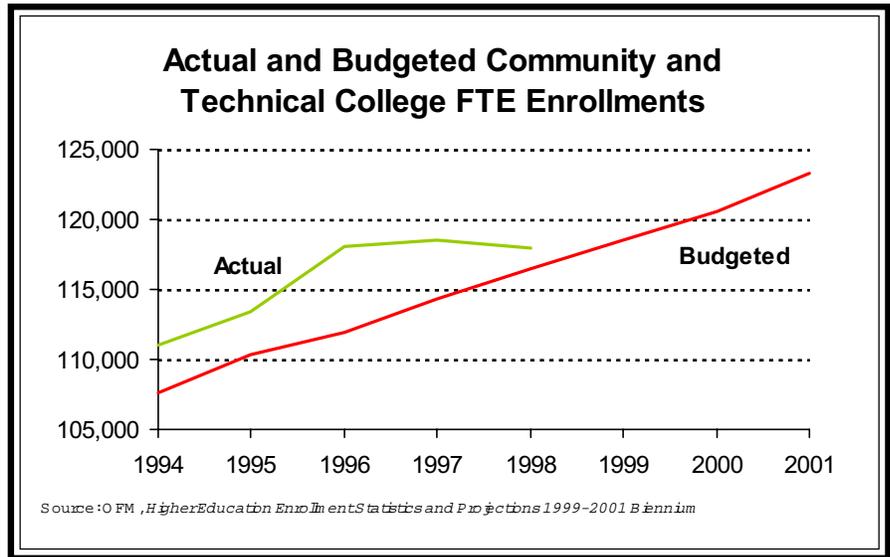


CHART 5

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State-supported students

As the “people’s colleges,” CTCs serve students with a wide range of educational goals.

Chart 6 distributes state-supported students according to their reasons for attending college in the fall of 1998: 45 percent signed up to upgrade their job skills, 32 percent to prepare for transfer to a four-year college or university, 10 percent to acquire basic skills in language and mathematics, and 13 percent to ready themselves for such things as parenting, homemaking and retiring.

Chart 7 distributes student course enrollments over four categories: academic, vocational, developmental and basic skills. (Developmental and basic-skills courses cover “pre-college level” matter.)

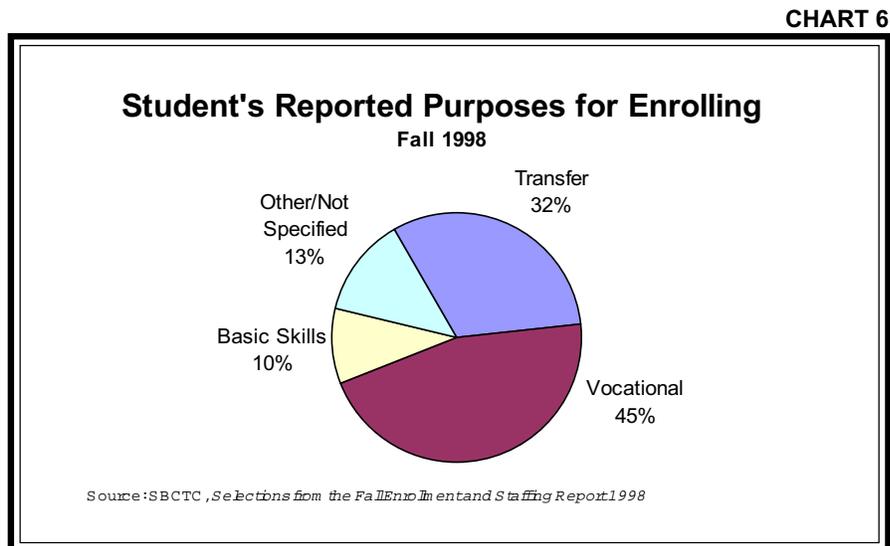


CHART 6

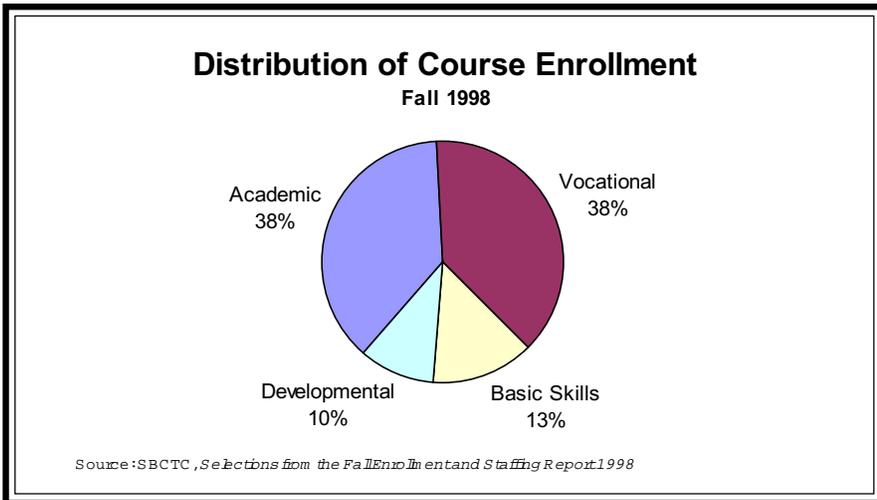


CHART 7

“Although the number of students attending the CTCs in order to upgrade their job skills exceeds the number intending to transfer to a four-year school, the numbers of academic and vocational courses are roughly equal.”

Although the number of students attending the CTCs in order to upgrade their job skills exceeds the number intending to transfer to a four-year school, the numbers of academic and vocational courses are roughly equal. This is, in part, because vocational students take some academic courses as part of their programs of study.

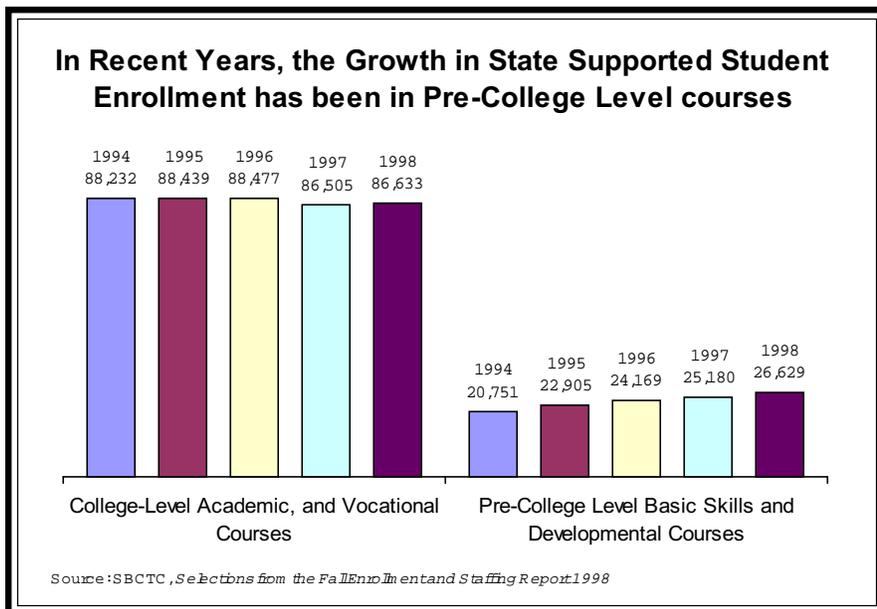
Basic-skills courses mainly fall into three groups: ABE, adult basic education for students reading and writing below the 9th grade level; ESL, English as a second language for recent immigrants; and GED, preparation for the general

educational development certificate examination for students who have not completed high school.

Development courses focus primarily on remedial math and writing for students simultaneously enrolled in college-level courses.

Chart 8 shows that the percentage of student enrollments in pre-college courses has increased in recent years. Between 1994 and 1998, fall-quarter FTE enrollment increased a net 4,279 students, or 3.9 percent, with pre-college enrollment growing by 5,878. College-level enrollment fell by 1,599.

CHART 8



Student age

Students attending two-year colleges typically are older than those going to four-year schools. The average age of CTC students is 30.7, compared with 24.3 at the other colleges and universities.

At the community colleges, students aiming to transfer to a four-year school tend to be younger than those seeking vocational training. Chart 9 shows the distribution of student ages taking state-funded courses.

In the fall of 1997, the average age of CTC students taking academic courses was 27.5; developmental courses, 25.6; vocational courses, 32.1; basic skills courses, 33.

Transfers

Preparing students to transfer and earn baccalaureate degrees at four-year schools continues to be a major activity of community colleges. National research, however, suggests that students who start their higher education in community colleges are somewhat less likely to achieve a baccalaureate degree than those who start in four-year schools.

Chart 10 shows the number of student transfers from community colleges in four-year Washington schools during the 10-year period 1988-89 to 1997-98.

From 1988-89, the number of transfers to public four-year schools jumped 50 percent to 9,811 in 1996-97 and then fell to 8,785 in 1997-98. There were no trends in the transfer numbers to private schools.

During the period, the number of students enrolling in academic courses at the community colleges increased. This increase in the number of potential transferees is one factor in the increasing number of transfers. But an additional factor was an increase in the proportion of students transferring.

Chart 11 shows transfer rates, calculated by dividing the number of transfers in each year by the FTE enrollment in academic courses in the previous year. The transfer rate to the public four-year schools increased during the period. On the other hand, the transfer rate from the community colleges to the private schools fell.

Program funding

During 1997-98, the sum of state appropriations and state-supported student tuition was about \$521 million.

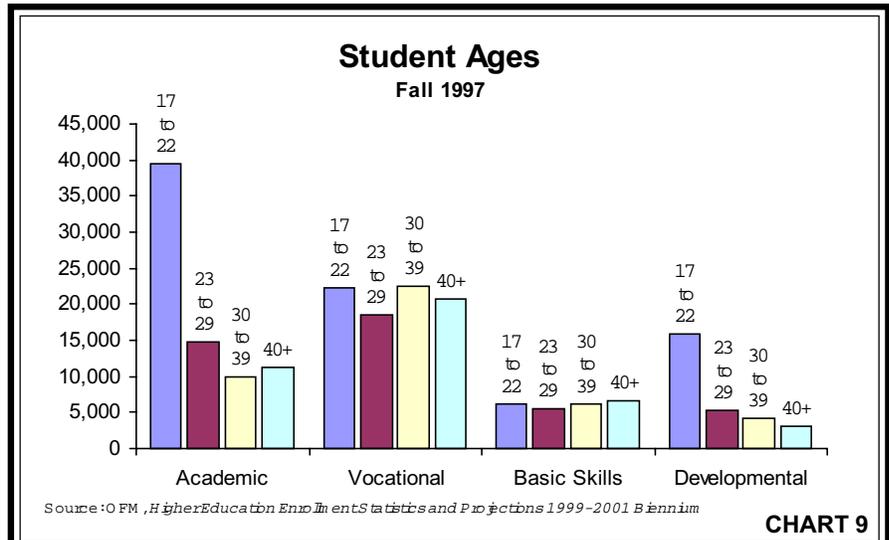


CHART 9

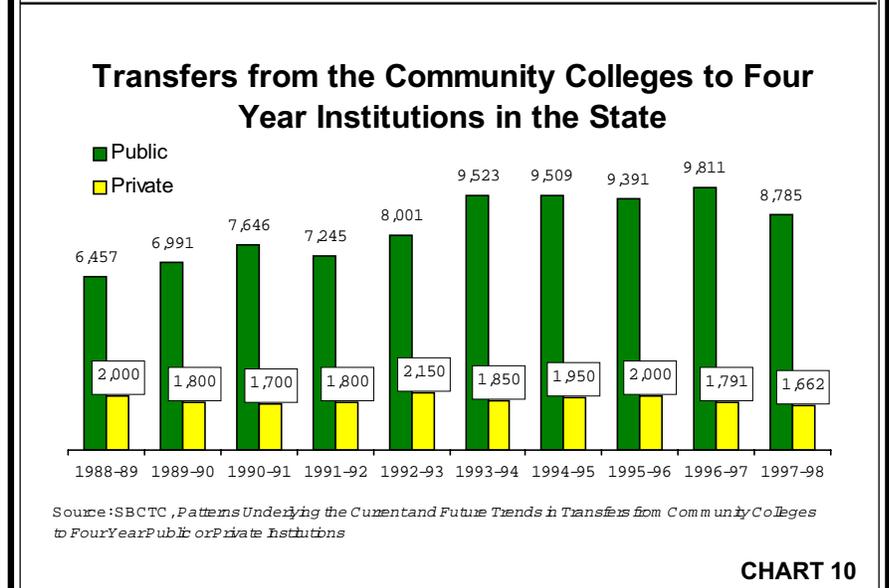


CHART 10

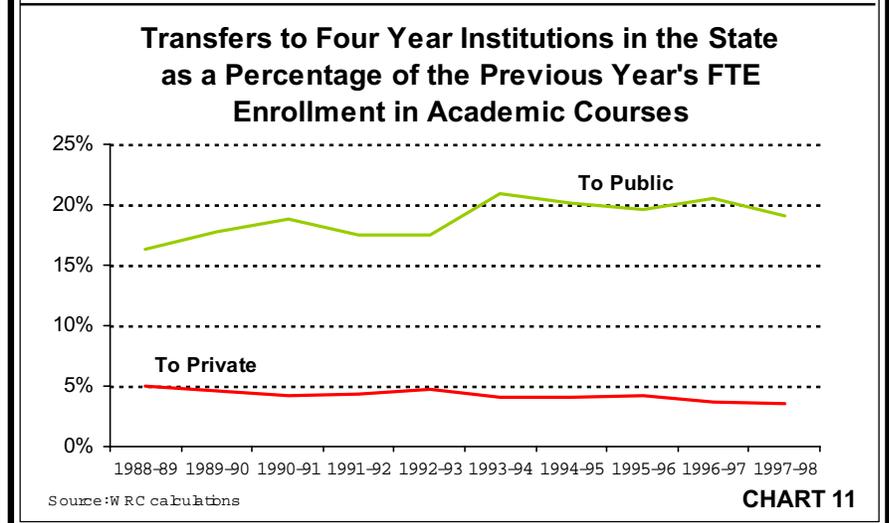


CHART 11

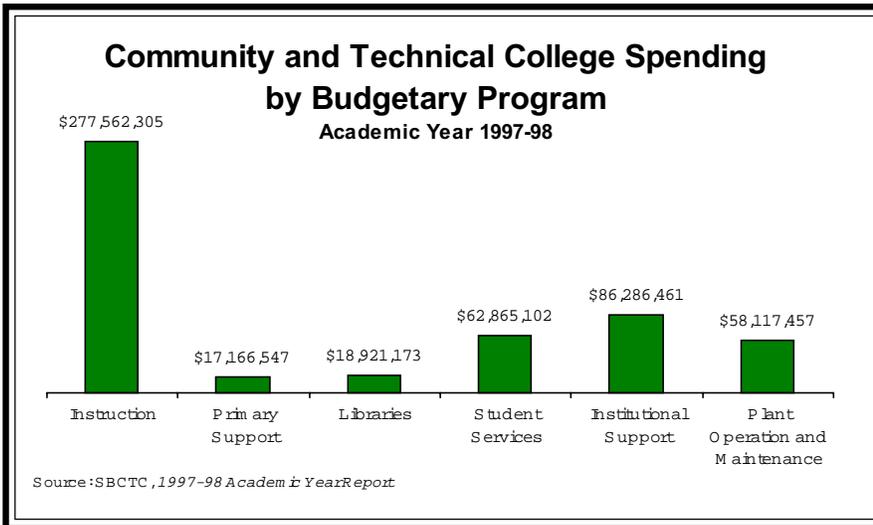


CHART 12

Chart 12 shows how this money was divided among CTC programs. More than half was spent on instruction. In descending order, smaller amounts were spent on institutional support, student services, and plant operation and maintenance.

Contract students

Most contract students enrolled in the community and technical colleges are funded by other units of government, such as school districts or the state Department of Corrections, not by businesses, as is commonly believed.

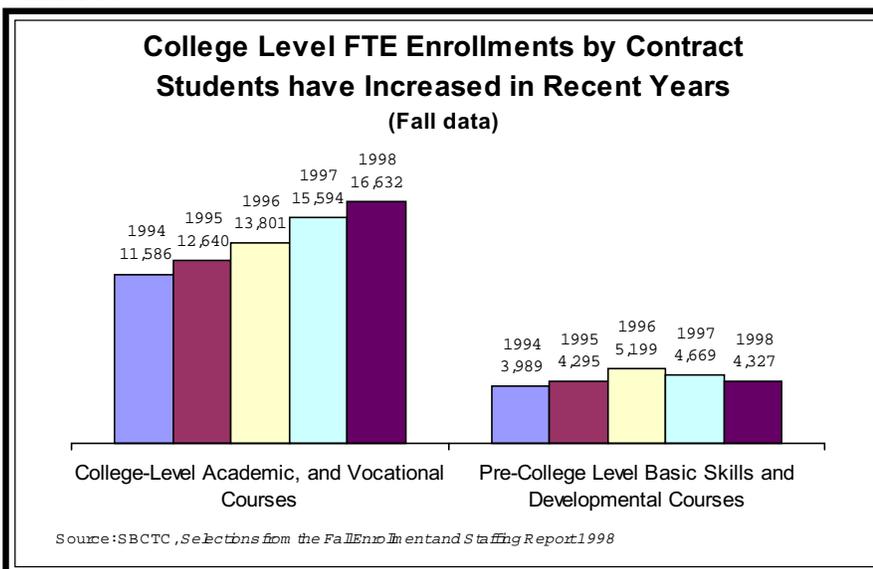
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The number of contract students has grown significantly during the past 20 years. By the fall of 1998, they accounted for 15 percent of FTE enrollment, up from 3 percent in the late 1970s.

In 1998, FTE enrollment in contract courses totaled 20,959. Of that number, 35 percent participated in the Running Start program, in which high school students take community-college courses. State prison inmates accounted for 18 percent of enrollments, and international students for 17 percent.

From 1994 to 1998, the growth of FTE enrollment in contract courses outpaced that in state-supported courses. As Chart 13 shows, the growth in contract enrollments has been in college-level courses. This contrasts with state-supported enrollments, where all the recent growth has been in pre-college courses.

CHART 13



Much of the growth in contract enrollment is due to the Running Start program, which expanded from 3,775 to 7,402 FTE students over the period. Running Start allows eleventh and twelfth graders to simultaneously earn high school and college credits for classes taken at the colleges. The students pay no tuition; the colleges are reimbursed by the school districts.

Welfare

In recent years, many welfare recipients attended the CTCs, both as state-supported and as contract students.

In the early 1990s, the state's major welfare-to-work program, JOBS, encouraged people on welfare to enroll in college full-time. In 1997, the legislature replaced JOBS with a new program, called WorkFirst. WorkFirst aims to move welfare recipients into jobs as quickly as possible. As a result, CTC welfare-recipient enrollments dropped from 13,873 FTE in the fall of 1995 to 5,760 in 1998. See Chart 14.

Four new WorkFirst training programs recently began at the colleges. The stated goals of the programs are to get "WorkFirst students started in better jobs than they could find without training" and help "them to advance in employment and earnings." The programs are also open to low-wage workers who are not on welfare. About 1600 students were enrolled in these programs in the fall of 1998.

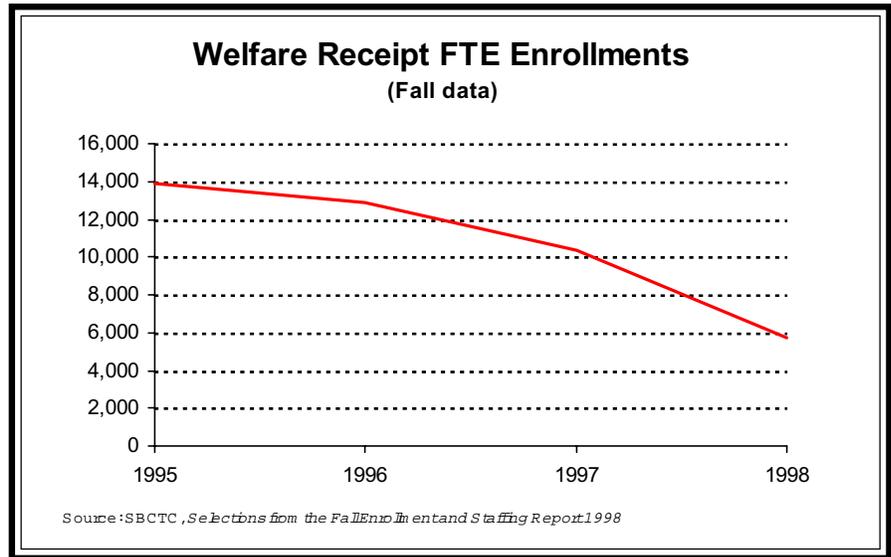


CHART 14

Faculty and staff

Chart 15 shows how 1997-98 expenditures of state appropriations and operating fees were divided among various budgetary objects.

The production of education is very labor intensive. Salaries and wages were 65 percent of expenditures and employee benefits were another 16 percent.

In the fall of 1998, CTCs employed 16,270 individuals. Of these, 13,478 were state funded.

Part-time employment is common at the colleges, particularly among the faculty. Fall 1998 FTE employment was 10,430. Fifty-six percent was faculty, while 44 percent was staff.

For three-quarters of the staff (33 percent of FTE employment), work conditions are set by Washington's civil-service laws or by negotiated union contracts. These college employees are classified staff. The remaining members of the staff are exempt

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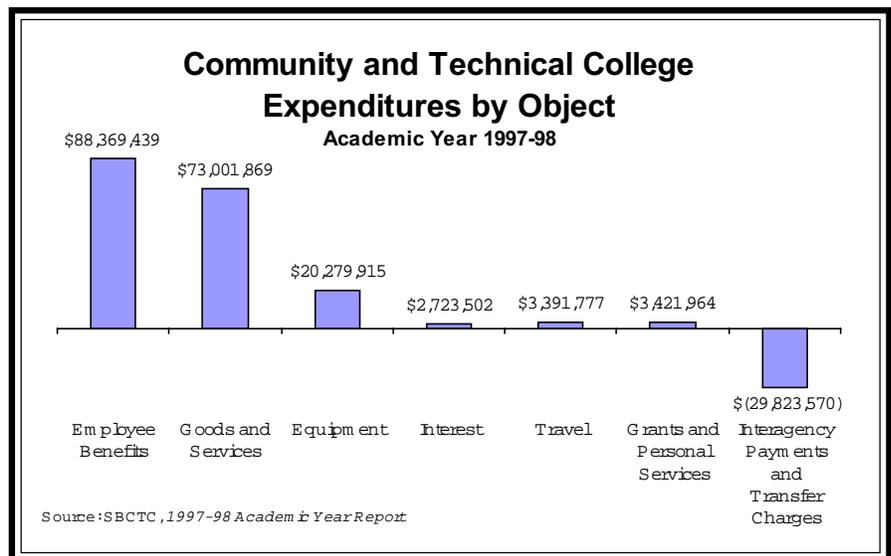


CHART 15

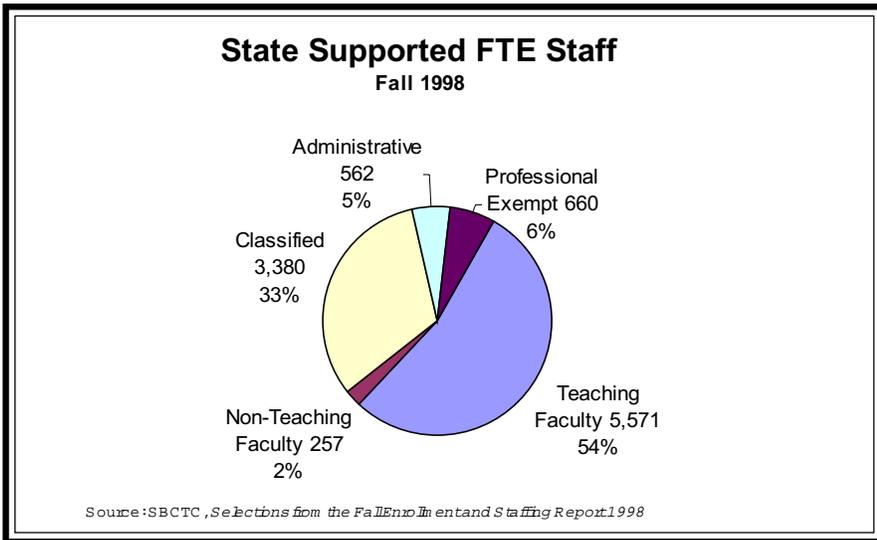


CHART 16

from the state civil-service system. They include the colleges' top administrators as well as individuals in a number of professional and technical positions.

In the fall of 1998, full-time faculty shouldered 55 percent of the teaching load, part-time faculty 43 percent, and volunteers 2 percent.

Historically, community colleges have relied more on part-time faculty than four-year schools have. This has given the colleges greater flexibility in meeting course changes requested by students. The colleges have drawn on the pool of highly qualified people who want to teach part-time in the evening to supplement the income from their day jobs.

“Many fear that the reliance on low-paid part-time faculty compromises the quality of CTC education. The SBCTC staff’s survey of the national research on the quality differential between full-time and part-time teaching found no significant differences.”

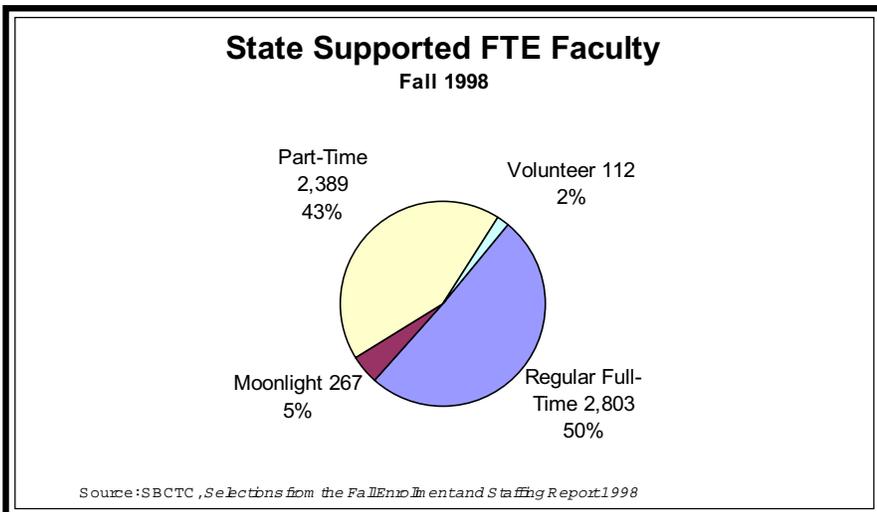
Community colleges have a big financial incentive to hire part-time faculty. The per-class compensation for part-timers is less than half that of full-time faculty.

Many fear that the reliance on low-paid part-time faculty compromises the quality of CTC education. The SBCTC staff’s survey of the national research on the quality differential between full-time and part-time teaching found no significant differences. And when the SBCTC staff looked at Washington’s colleges, they likewise could find no evidence of a difference in quality between full-time and part-time quality.

Nevertheless, reducing the disparity in pay between full-time and part-time faculty remains a priority for policy makers. In addition to providing 3

percent annual increases to all faculty, the recently adopted state budget includes \$10 million for special pay increases for part-time faculty.

CHART 17



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This Special Report is the third in a series of reports on higher education made possible, in part, by the support of the M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust and the Ben B. Cheney Foundation.

Selected Recent Publications

POLICY BRIEF: Capacity Not Currently a Problem at Four-Year Schools - March 17, 1999 - The most recent Applications Match Study finds that nearly every qualified undergraduate applicant is able to gain admission to a public college, though perhaps not to his or her first choice.

POLICY BRIEF: Tuition: Will Students Take a Hike - February 23, 1999

POLICY BRIEF: 1999 - 2001 Higher Education Budget General Fund State Highlights - February 12, 1999

SPECIAL REPORT: Trends in Higher Education Finance - February 5, 1999 - This report identifies five trends: 1) Since 1970, state spending on higher education has increased steadily, but higher education as a percentage of total state spending has decreased; 2) Enrollments grew dramatically from 1960 to 1980, especially at the state community colleges; 3) Sponsored Research and Hospitals have represented an increasing share of higher education spending; 4) Real per student spending has grown, while students' tuition covers an increasing share of educational costs; and 5) Higher education's share of state capital spending has increased.

SPECIAL REPORT: State's College Financial Aid Program Gets a Failing Grade, March 27, 1998 - The State Need Grant, Washington state's largest financial aid program for college students, should play a critical role in guaranteeing that young people have access to higher education, but this report finds that the program is currently structured, it fails in this role and should be completely overhauled. Washington State ranks high in national comparisons of financial aid funding per student. However, the design of the system is seriously flawed. In its current form, Washington's State Need Grant Program does a poor job of ensuring access to the baccalaureate institutions for economically disadvantaged students who are under the age of 24. To meet the challenge of the expanding college enrollments, the program will have to be fundamentally redesigned.

SPECIAL REPORT: Defining the Challenge: A Closer Look at Higher Education, May 17, 1997 - This report examines the state Master Plan for Higher Education which calls for an increase in enrollments well beyond that implied by simple demographics and not supported by other evidence. The report offers the alternative of a reduction in the general tuition subsidy and an increase in need-based aid.

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