California's Financially Safer Colleges

What is a "financially safer" college?

A college that supports its students better than other similar colleges in terms of cost, graduation rate, debt burden, and mobility, based on our analysis of College Scorecard data. Click here for a detailed explanation of the data we use and how we analyze it.



Families with low to moderate income pay less out of pocket



Low-income and students of color graduate at similar rates as their counterparts



Low-income students leave with less debt and are better able to repay their loans



Low-income students recoup the costs of their degree faster

Should I only apply to financially safer colleges?

uAspire strongly recommends that every student apply to at least *one* financially safer college. We also encourage you to include a variety of different types of colleges on your list.

What's the difference between community colleges and the other colleges & universities on this list?

Community colleges are sometimes referred to as "2-year colleges". They offer Associates degrees ("2-year degree") along with certificates. Public and private colleges & universities are often referred to as "4-year schools". They offer Bachelor's degrees ("4-year degree") and also advanced degrees. Students pursuing a Bachelor's degree often begin at community college and then transfer to another college/university to complete their program.

What's the difference between public and private colleges & universities?

Public and private colleges & universities differ in many ways, but most notably in cost of attendance. Among private colleges, those that meet full financial need are more likely to be affordable, but more difficult to get into.

Public financially safer community colleges

Bay Area			
Canada College	Skyline College	City College of San Francisco	Los Medanos College
College of San Mateo	Contra Costa College	Santa Rosa Junior College	Diablo Valley College

Scan or click to view all financially safer colleges in the West on a map, along with their average net prices

See second page for more community colleges

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Public financially safer community colleges

Northern Coast & Inland	Feather River Community College
Butte College	College of the Redwoods

Greater Sacramento & Gold Country	Sierra College
Folson Lake College	Solano Community College
Napa Valley College	Woodland Community College
San Joaquin Delta College	Yuba College

South Central Coast	College of the Canyons
Moorpark College	Oxnard College
Taft College	Ventura College

San Joaquin Valley	
Clovis Community College	Merced College
College of the Sequoias	Porterville College
Fresno City College	Reedley College

San Diego & Imperial Valley	San Diego Mesa College
San Diego Miramar College	Imperial Valley College
Grossmont College	San Diego City College

Central Coast	
Chabot College	Hartnell College
De Anza College	Las Positas College
Foothill College	Mission College
Gavilan College	West Valley College

Los Angeles	Santa Monica College
Compton College	Glendale Community College
Pasadena City College	Los Angeles Southwest College
El Camino Community College District	West Los Angeles College

Orange County	Saddleback College
Cerritos College	Santa Ana College
Golden West College	Mt San Antonio College
Irvine Valley College	Santiago Canyon College

Inland Empire	Riverside City College
Mt. San Jacinto Community College	Victor Valley College
Norco College	Moreno Valley College
	Chaffey College

See next page for public and private colleges & universities

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Public financially safer colleges & universities

University of California	
UC Berkeley^	
UC Davis	UC Irvine^
UC Riverside	UC Santa Barbara
UCLA ^	UC San Diego^

California State University		
CSU San Bernardino	Cal State Fullerton	Fresno State
Cal State LA	CSU Bakersfield	CSU Northridge
CSU Long Beach	CSU Monterey Bay	Stanislaus State

Private financially safer colleges & universities

College	City
California Institute of Technology*^	Pasadena
California Lutheran University	Thousand Oaks
Claremont McKenna College*^	Claremont
Fresno Pacific University	Fresno
Harvey Mudd College*^	Claremont
Occidental College*	LA
Pitzer College*^	Claremont
Pomona College*^	Claremont
Scripps College*	Claremont
Soka University of America	Aliso Viejo
Stanford University*^	Stanford

College	City
Thomas Aquinas College	Santa Paula
University of Redlands	Redlands
University of San Diego	San Diego
University of San Francisco	SF
University of Southern California*^	Los Angeles
University of the Pacific	Stockton
Vanguard University of Southern California	Costa Mesa
Westmont College	Santa Barbara
Whittier College	Whittier

What does it mean if a college has an asterisk (*) or a carat (^) next to it?

Asterisks indicate financially safer colleges that meet students' full financial need, which means they guarantee to provide the full amount of financial aid they determine a student needs. Carats indicate financially safer colleges that have an acceptance rate less than 25% and are highly selective.

Recommendations are current only for 2026-2027 academic year

Source: Based on uAspire's analysis of the U.S. Department of Education's College Scorecard data from Spring 2026 and Third Way's economic mobility index.