

COMMUNITY COLLEGES: A HIDDEN GEM FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

We have small class sizes and faculty spend a lot of time focused on teaching, Alex Peterson, Director of the Center for Global Engagement at Snow College in Ephraim, Utah.



Many community colleges are reaching out to international students including those with disabilities as they look for ways to create a more global experience for all on their campus. International students with disabilities are finding community colleges a great experience, whether pursuing a certificate or Associate's Degree in a technical field or in general education with a plan to work towards a four-year degree. Community colleges offer affordability, ease of adjustment to a new academic system, a new community, a new culture, and the option to receive support on a more personalized scale.

Often for international students with disabilities coming to the United States, it can be overwhelming to study at a large university, navigating a large campus, understanding the types of support services offered, and also arriving into a new disability culture. In addition to Alex noting that community college classrooms are smaller, community colleges are also intertwined with the local community. All students, including international students with disabilities have a plethora of opportunities to interact with a broad audience because of this campus – community relationship -- in the arts, politics and government, sports, business and commerce, and educational

opportunities. Students are able to develop relationships with people from all walks of life.

With regards to tuition costs, students can complete the first two years of their bachelor of arts/science degree at a community college at considerably less cost compared to a four-year institution. They can then transfer and complete that degree at a four-year college or university, such as Utah Valley University or the University of Wisconsin.

Many community colleges have partnerships with universities to enable students completing their Associates degree to transfer, thereby easing the process of gaining admission to a university. These partnerships, "guided pathway" or "direct-transfer" programs, are designed to create a clear pathway for students towards degree completion while helping them to work toward their education goals and desired careers.

After arriving to the United States and becoming a fully enrolled student, additional scholarship opportunities may open up as well as the chance to offset expenses through on-campus employment. Some community colleges like Snow College offer grants, or tuition waivers, either of which can result in awards in excess of \$5000 annually.

Even though these opportunities may be available, it is still recommended that international students arrive to the United States self-sufficient to cover all costs in order to prevent any financial hardships.

In the case of Snow College, international students apply for these opportunities as they apply for admission. A scholarship committee decides whether and how much to award based on considerations including grades and extracurricular activities.

When Abdul Rahman Ashamiri, a blind student traveled from Saudi Arabia to enroll at Snow College in Ephraim Utah, a partial tuition waiver enabled him to only have to pay in-state tuition. Additionally, a scholarship from a local businessman in his home country covered his tuition and living costs.

The tuition waivers are not only for students with disabilities, but if a student writes a strong essay about how their disability has helped them to become a better world citizen it could help them earn a waiver from the committee, Alex Peterson.

Students planning to study at a community college should make sure to check before choosing a college about such waivers and scholarships for international students, as it is not something that every college in the United States offers. The Center for Global Engagement at Snow College worked with the Vice President of Finance in order to make these waivers available.

In recruiting international students with disabilities or otherwise, colleges like Snow College see the value in recruiting diverse students from different countries and world regions. This also enhances campus internationalization with interaction among American students and international students coming from many countries and cultural backgrounds arriving to Ephraim, Utah. Alex advises that this cannot be accomplished just by waiting for the phone to ring. It needs to come about through targeted incentives and intentional outreach such as partial tuition waivers to boost the college's international profile in places where they are less known.

Alex Peterson stresses that there are no free rides at Snow College, even for international students with disabilities. While community college can be a great way to save money, prospective students should be sure to secure funding and try to apply for fully funded scholarships, if available.