Community colleges offer accessible high school completion programs (GEDs and high school diplomas), post-secondary certificates and 2-year associate degrees, job training, and continuing education opportunities to our region’s residents. When compared with the academic year full-time undergraduate in-state tuitions at the two local public undergraduate universities (Portland State University and Washington State University, Vancouver), community college tuitions are about half of the cost. Yearly tuitions at our community colleges for academic year 2013-2014, at approximately $4,000, were less than a tenth of some of the region’s elite private institutions such as Lewis and Clark College and Reed ($41,928 and $46,010 respectively)(National Center for Education Statistics).

Not surprisingly, given the broad range of ages and purposes that community colleges serve, Clackamas, Clark, Mt. Hood, and Portland community colleges enrolled nearly 64,000 students in fall of 2012. While their unique portfolio of programs make them difficult to compare with public universities, that number represents nearly three times the undergraduate enrollment of Portland State University, the state’s largest 4-year university.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, most of the associates degrees granted in all of our community colleges (in 2012-2013) were in liberal arts and sciences, with health professions and business related majors vying for second place. Engineering and engineering technology ranked third. The category of “Homeland Security, Law Enforcement, Firefighting, and Related Protective Services,” while not offered everywhere represented a significant number (at 96) of associates degrees awarded at Portland Community College in 2012-2013.  

Note: WSU statistics are for the Vancouver campus only.

Sources: National Center for Education Statistics; *Washington State University (http://ir.wsu.edu/Student%20Data)