



Community colleges offer affordable paths to fulfilling and profitable careers

Joan Westlake for Mesa Community College Published 1:30 p.m. MT Jan. 3, 2019



(Photo: Getty Images)

You deserve a career that makes you proud and financially more secure. Impatient to get started? There are ways to make a new life happen quickly.

First step, take a look at what you already know, where you want to go and then seek out the education needed to put you on a path to success, possibly in a year or less.

Nearly a degree

How about a degree you've already earned? If you have taken some college courses, you may already have enough credits for an associate degree and could be close to a four-year degree. People with a bachelor's degree earn nearly twice as much each week as those with just a high school degree and are half as likely to be unemployed, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

You may have already earned or are on your way to an associate degree through the award-winning [Maricopa Reverse Transfer Program](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FnuBCHkzPe4) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FnuBCHkzPe4>). The Reverse Transfer initiative is a collaborative effort between Maricopa Community Colleges and Arizona's major universities. Students who transferred without completing their associate degree are given the opportunity to combine MCC and university credits to determine if associate degree requirements have been met. It costs you nothing but time to find out if you qualify and be awarded the degree. Find out more at the [Reverse Transfer website](https://www.maricopa.edu/academics/university-transfer/reverse-transfer) (<https://www.maricopa.edu/academics/university-transfer/reverse-transfer>).

Career and Technical Programs

Do you love animals? Are you a wizard on the computer? Does crime scene analysis intrigue you? Enjoy working on cars? Have that hero in you to be an EMT? Community colleges can be the best and most affordable way to help you find and enter an exciting career.

If you don't know what appealing careers might be in your future, there are free exploration sites. The federal government's [O*Net Online](https://www.onetonline.org/search/hot_tech/) (https://www.onetonline.org/search/hot_tech/) offers tools and data to search for potential jobs and analyze whether or not they are as in-demand and lucrative as you want.

Colleges like Mesa Community College have [Career Services Departments](https://www.mesacc.edu/career) (<https://www.mesacc.edu/career>) with free resources and assistance for career planning, job searching and internships. You can [submit questions online](https://www.mesacc.edu/career/career-planning-exploration) (<https://www.mesacc.edu/career/career-planning-exploration>), but for the full benefits make an appointment to stop by. Or go to [mesacc.edu](https://www.mesacc.edu) (<https://www.mesacc.edu>) and start exploring more than a hundred degrees and certificates; many you can earn entirely online.

Tech skills

Technology is an area where it's possible to quickly tool up to add value to the job you have or launch a new career. O*Net Online has a list of [hot technologies](https://www.onetonline.org/search/hot_tech/) (https://www.onetonline.org/search/hot_tech/) compiled based on skills and qualifications found most often in job postings. MCC offers opportunities to earn certificates and get hands-on training in a year or less with tech courses like [Apple's Swift/xCode app development](https://www.mesacc.edu/departments/business-information-systems/everyone-can-code) (<https://www.mesacc.edu/departments/business-information-systems/everyone-can-code>), [blockchain](https://www.mesacc.edu/departments/business-information-systems/mcccd-it-institute) (<https://www.mesacc.edu/departments/business-information-systems/mcccd-it-institute>), [computer programming](https://www.mesacc.edu/programs/detail/computer-programming-ccl) (<https://www.mesacc.edu/programs/detail/computer-programming-ccl>), technical support, Red Hat Academy Linux, software engineering and [web developer](https://www.mesacc.edu/programs/map/web-developer-aas) (<https://www.mesacc.edu/programs/map/web-developer-aas>). In addition to courses held on the MCC campuses, MCCC IT Institute classes are conveniently scheduled in the evenings and in hybrid formats – online and on campus -- in the heart of Mesa's Downtown Technology Corridor.

How it's done

Collin Hicks, 26, is the first Mesa Community College student to complete the Red Hat Academy and earn his Red Hat Certified Systems Administrator (RHCSA) certification. Hicks began at MCC in fall 2017, when the college first began offering the Red Hat Academy to help prepare students to take the RHCSA exam and become Linux professionals in demand by business and industry.

Hicks said, "I was tired of working hourly wage jobs and decided I needed to plan my future a bit better. I did some research into the best jobs you could get in two years from a community college because I wanted to start a new career as soon as possible. Also, I was paying for everything myself and a community college was much more sensible than going to a university where the cost is so much higher."

He explained that he looked into pursuing career areas in which he had some experience and interest. When he was younger, he "played" with computers and coding as a hobby, never considering it as a job. In late spring 2017, he spoke with Network Academy Advisor Jessica Bradford, who helped him put together a plan that included pursuing a Linux administrator career.

"MCC offered the computer classes that interested me and the campus is positioned halfway between home and work so it's very convenient," Hicks said. "It's taken me less than a year to earn the RHCSA. I've taken 17 or 18 credits every semester including summer. Next semester I will graduate with two associates -- Associate in Applied Science in Networking System Administration and an Associate in Applied Science in Linux Networking Administration."

Facebook, Amazon, Google and Interest all run on Linux. More than 90 percent of Fortune 500 companies rely on Red Hat Enterprise Linux and 82 percent of Linux job postings seek Red Hat Certified professionals. Hicks said that if you apply yourself, the MCC classes prepare you for the certification exam, which he describes as "pretty tough."

As he looks to graduation, Hicks says although the RHCSA certification has sparked interest, he still needs IT experience. Some of the computer trouble shooting skills he learned at MCC are moving him into the beginning of the career he wants with his current employer. His future plans are to pursue a cybersecurity degree.

Scholarships and other \$\$

Sage advice from Hicks is for new students to apply for [financial aid \(https://www.mesacc.edu/financial-aid\)](https://www.mesacc.edu/financial-aid) as soon as possible. You don't need to be registered for classes to fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). To start the scholarship search process, you just need to enroll at MCC, for which there is a \$15 fee. Hicks did receive a Pell grant his second semester and earned honors scholarships twice.

Be certain to compare costs and factors such as the [passing rate for the institute's students \(https://www.mesacc.edu/sites/default/files/pages/students/student-resources/licensure-certification.pdf\)](https://www.mesacc.edu/sites/default/files/pages/students/student-resources/licensure-certification.pdf) if a qualifying professional exam is required. For example, the [dental hygienist \(https://study.com/dental_hygiene_schools_in_arizona.html\)](https://study.com/dental_hygiene_schools_in_arizona.html) program at MCC has a 100 percent licensure passing rate and offers considerable savings compared to four-year universities and private schools.

Start exploring now with a click to a website or visit to a campus. You are the only thing blocking your path. Move out of your way and succeed.

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