

# Examining Affordability in Ohio: Central Region Profile

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## Introduction

When making college-going decisions, students and their families often cite concerns about how much it will cost to attend a college or university<sup>1</sup>. While the long-term financial outcomes of someone with a postsecondary credential far exceed those of a high school graduate<sup>2</sup>, short-term costs to enroll in higher education and the foregone wages when a student is stopped-out of the workforce often feel prohibitive to those hoping to pursue a postsecondary credential.

As such, higher education affordability is a high priority for policymakers in many states, including Ohio. The objective of this brief is to explore the current higher education affordability landscape in **Central Ohio**, including the Columbus metropolitan area.

This brief is organized into four sections, each of which explores an area of interest to those concerned about higher education affordability across Ohio and specifically in the state's Central region:

1. Tuition and fees and cost of attendance at public institutions in this region,
2. Financial aid and scholarships available to students attending these institutions,
3. Take up of federal student loans and student loan burden, and
4. Immediate workforce outcomes when graduates enter the labor force.

This brief focuses only on **public** higher education institutions in West Ohio, and the experience of **in-state undergraduates** who enroll at these colleges and universities. This is because policymakers in Ohio have jurisdiction only over those institutions receiving public dollars, and resources available to students (i.e., state financial aid awards) are available only to those who are residents of the state.

Public colleges and universities and adult career centers highlighted in this brief include:

Adult and Community Education - Columbus City Schools Hudson  
Career and Technology Education Centers of Licking County (C-TEC)  
Central Ohio Technical College  
Columbus State Community College  
Eastland-Fairfield Career and Technical Schools  
Knox County Career Center  
Marion Technical College  
Ohio State University - Main Campus  
Ohio State University - Marion Campus  
Ohio State University - Newark Campus

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<sup>1</sup> Inside Higher Ed (2023). Student Voice Survey. Available: <https://www.insidehighered.com/collections/student-voice/2023>

<sup>2</sup> The Federal Reserve Bank of New York (2022). *Labor Market for Recent College Graduates*. Available: <https://www.newyorkfed.org/research/college-labor-market/index.html#/wages>

## Tuition and Fees and Cost of Attendance

College tuition is perhaps the most used measure when considering higher education affordability. While this is a widely recognized and critically useful metric, it is incomplete. Cost of attendance (COA) is a much more robust measure of the actual costs to attend a higher education institution; these costs include room and board<sup>3</sup>, books and supplies, and transportation.

Cost of attendance varies greatly across technical colleges, two- and four-year colleges and universities in Central Ohio, ranging from \$1,202 at Career and Technology Education Centers (C-TEC) of Licking County, to \$37,921 at Tri-Rivers Career Center. **Table 1** includes both Tuition and Fees and total Cost of Attendance amounts for in-state students attending each of these institutions.

**Table 1: Tuition and fees and total cost of attendance – Southwest Ohio Public Institutions<sup>4</sup>**

Institution	In-state tuition & fees	Total in-state COA
Adult and Community Education - Columbus City Schools Hudson	\$15,900	\$30,298
Career and Technology Education Centers of Licking County	\$797	\$1,202
Central Ohio Technical College	\$5,016	\$18,464
Columbus State Community College	\$5,188	\$17,312
Eastland-Fairfield Career and Technical Schools	\$7,700	\$17,341
Knox County Career Center	\$14,339	\$36,690
Marion Technical College	\$6,325	\$14,925
Ohio State University - Main Campus	\$12,485	\$30,185
Ohio State University - Marion Campus	\$8,944	\$23,862
Ohio State University Newark Campus	\$8,944	\$23,862
Ohio University - Lancaster Campus	\$6,004	\$16,466
Tri-Rivers Career Center	\$14,375	\$37,921

<sup>3</sup> When available, this brief includes *on-campus housing* in its cost of attendance calculations. For institutions that do not have on-campus housing available to students, *off-campus housing* costs are included.

<sup>4</sup> Data for the 2021-22 academic year provided by National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and the Ohio Department of Higher Education.

## Financial Aid

Financial aid is imperative for many students to enroll in higher education, decreasing the cost of attendance dramatically, especially for students from low-income backgrounds. Many students and their families, however, are often not aware of the grants and scholarships for which they are eligible<sup>5</sup> and are often overwhelmed by the process<sup>6</sup> to apply for financial aid – the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA.) The FAFSA is required to access federal aid (i.e., Pell grants) and is often required - as is the case in Ohio - to access state grant aid programs (i.e., the Ohio College Opportunity Grant.)

**Table 2** presents the proportion of students<sup>7</sup> at each public institution in Central Ohio that are receiving grants and scholarships from federal-, state-, and institution-level sources. The majority of students at these twelve colleges and universities are receiving some sort of aid; the source varies by each institution. The proportion of low-income students receiving Pell grants, for example, ranges from 18 percent at Ohio State University - Main Campus to 89 percent at Adult and Community Education - Columbus City Schools Hudson. Across the board throughout this region's public campuses, relatively few students have access to state aid. This is likely due to constraints around the institutions at which a student can use the OCOG, the state's largest grant program. Institutions with large endowments and/or advanced private or community-based philanthropic engagement are able to provide many more students with institutional aid, as is the case, for example, at Knox Career Center where 80 percent of students receive some sort of financial aid from the institution itself. At Knox, The Ariel Foundation, Knox County Foundation, Ohio Means Jobs, and Richland County Foundation play a tremendous role in offsetting cost to learners. Other institutionally-based scholarships are pertinent to institutional aid as well (i.e., Anna V. Waters Scholarship, Single Parent Scholarship, Adult Learner Scholarship, etc.)<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Dynarski, S., and Scott-Clayton, J. (2013). *Financial aid policy: Lessons from research*. NBER Working Paper #18710.

<sup>6</sup> Scott-Clayton, J. (2012). *Information constraints and financial aid policy*. NBER Working Paper #17811.

<sup>7</sup> Data is limited to first-year enrollees, as this grant amount influences decision-making in ways that differ from upperclassmen undergraduates deciding whether to return to higher education.

<sup>8</sup> Knox County Career Center Scholarships: <https://www.knoxtechnicalcenter.com/financialaid.html>



**Table 2: Financial Aid, Grants and Scholarships – Southwest Ohio Public Institutions<sup>9</sup>**

Institution	% receiving any aid	% Pell	% State aid	% institutional aid
Adult and Community Education - Columbus City Schools Hudson	89%	89%	0%	0%
Career and Technology Education Centers of Licking County	70%	59%	6%	3%
Central Ohio Technical College	92%	54%	2%	35%
Columbus State Community College	81%	48%	2%	23%
Eastland-Fairfield Career and Technical Schools	73%	58%	8%	0%
Knox County Career Center	100%	60%	20%	80%
Marion Technical College	100%	58%	8%	35%
Ohio State University - Main Campus	83%	18%	12%	66%
Ohio State University - Marion Campus	82%	22%	18%	74%
Ohio State University Newark Campus	80%	37%	29%	63%
Ohio University - Lancaster Campus	83%	40%	8%	23%
Tri-Rivers Career Center	86%	29%	14%	0%

## Federal Student Loans/Loan Burden

Further, there is great concern among policymakers and higher education researchers alike about the amount of loan debt accrued by students pursuing postsecondary education. Student loan debt is often cited as a barrier to college graduates buying a home, or saving for their futures as they are required to repay their loans over, in some cases, 25-30 years.<sup>10</sup> **Table 3** displays the proportion of students at public institutions in Central Ohio who take on federal student loan debt. On average, loan amounts among those who choose to take on debt range from approximately \$3,500 to \$8,000.

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<sup>9</sup> Data for the 2021-22 academic year provided by National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and the Ohio Department of Higher Education.

<sup>10</sup> Chen, R., & Wiederspan, M. (2014) Understanding the Determinants of Debt Burden among College Graduates, *The Journal of Higher Education*, 85:4, 565-598.

**Table 3: Federal loan take up and average loan amount – Central Ohio Public Institutions<sup>11</sup>**

Institution	% with loans	Average loan amount in 2021-2022
Adult and Community Education - Hudson	89%	\$3,813
Career and Technology Education Centers of Licking County	67%	\$3,694
Central Ohio Technical College	26%	\$4,729
Columbus State Community College	34%	\$3,940
Eastland-Fairfield Career and Technical Schools	60%	\$4,730
Knox County Career Center	80%	-
Marion Technical College	22%	\$5,168
Ohio State University - Main Campus	36%	\$7,842
Ohio State University - Marion Campus	30%	\$5,347
Ohio State University - Newark Campus	43%	\$5,347
Ohio University - Lancaster Campus	44%	\$3,555
Tri-Rivers Career Center	43%	-

## Median 10-Year Earnings

In addition to the costs to attend higher education and the financial resources available to students to do so, much focus has shifted to what happens when students complete their postsecondary education. Specifically, many policymakers and higher education researchers are interested in post-graduation outcomes, particularly related to the workforce. While securing a job with a family-sustaining wage is not the sole priority of higher education, it is an important metric for determining a student's return on investment and whether the time they spend earning a credential has a short- and/or long-term financial payoff.

While there is tremendous variation by program at each of these colleges and universities, **Table 4** presents the median earnings of graduates from each public institution in West Ohio ten years after they initially enroll. Earnings at all twelve of these institutions for which data are available are well above the threshold ("Threshold 0") determined by the Gates Foundation's Postsecondary Value Commission as the cutoff for a student to earn more over time than would someone in West Ohio with only a high school diploma.

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<sup>11</sup> Data for the 2021-22 academic year provided by National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and the Ohio Department of Higher Education.

**Table 4: Median Earnings Ten Years Post-Initial Enrollment – Central Ohio Public Institutions<sup>12</sup>**

Institution	Median 10-year earnings
Adult and Community Education - Hudson	\$48,734
Career and Technology Education Centers of Licking County	\$36,617
Central Ohio Technical College	\$39,803
Columbus State Community College	\$41,374
Eastland-Fairfield Career and Technical Schools	\$40,018
Knox County Career Center	\$38,655
Marion Technical College	N/A
Ohio State University - Main Campus	\$63,285
Ohio State University - Marion Campus	\$63,285
Ohio State University - Newark Campus	\$63,285
Ohio University - Lancaster Campus	\$53,641
Tri-Rivers Career Center	\$47,555

## Recommendations

*Tuition and fees/Cost of Attendance* – Policymakers in Ohio should work to keep tuition low by 1. supporting colleges and universities to implement minimal tuition increases each year, and 2. by increasing operating funding to higher education institutions as the budget permits. This is true not only for institutions in Central Ohio, but statewide. This will shift some of the costs of higher education away from the individual student to the state, increasing access and affordability for students across the state.

*Financial aid* – For many reasons, students and their families are often daunted by the prospect of applying for financial aid. Higher education entities in Central Ohio should consider FAFSA-filing support and information campaigns about financial aid options to reduce misinformation about costs of college and the aid available to students. Further, state policymakers should consider the award amount and the institutions at which students can use the Ohio College Opportunity Grant and other state financial aid initiatives and consider new financial aid programs to meet the needs of diverse subgroups of students as the biennial budget allows.

*Federal loans and student debt* – As many students and their families are confused about the actual costs of higher education, those who take out student loans (specifically federal loans) sometimes take on more debt than is necessary. Institutions across Central Ohio should consider extensive communications, outreach, and advising to make students aware of how much debt should be taken on relative to his or her total Cost of Attendance, rather than

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<sup>12</sup> Earnings data obtained from the Equitable Value Explorer, developed by the Gates Foundation Postsecondary Value Commission. A data limitation is that regional and main campuses are aggregated in earnings reports.

encouraging students (explicitly or tacitly) to accept the entirety of the federal loan amounts offered to them.

*Workforce outcomes/median earnings* – For many students, workforce readiness is a top priority when enrolling in higher education. As such, informing students about high-need career fields in Central Ohio and the corresponding short- and long-term earnings is imperative when advising students about academic disciplines to pursue. Disaggregating this information to the academic program-level and making it available to students and community members (via communications campaigns, online dashboards, etc.) will allow students and their families the best chance at making the best-informed, most rational decisions about where to go to college and what to study.