

# Examining Affordability in Ohio: Southwest 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 **Southwest Ohio**, including the Cincinnati 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 Southwest 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 Southwest 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 postsecondary institutions highlighted in this brief include:

Butler Technology and Career Development Schools  
Cincinnati State Technical and Community College  
Great Oaks Career Campuses  
Miami University-Hamilton  
Miami University-Middletown  
Miami University-Oxford  
University of Cincinnati-Blue Ash College  
University of Cincinnati-Clermont College  
University of Cincinnati-Main Campus  
Warren County Career Center

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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 commonly 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 Southwest Ohio, ranging from \$15,909 at Great Oaks Career Campuses, to \$35,509 at Miami University-Oxford. **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
Butler Technology and Career Development Schools	\$909	\$2,247
Cincinnati State Tech and Community College	\$5,274	\$17,244
Great Oaks Career Campuses	\$6,214	\$15,909
Miami University-Hamilton	\$7,072	\$28,376
Miami University-Middletown	\$7,072	\$28,376
Miami University-Oxford	\$15,555	\$35,509
University of Cincinnati-Blue Ash	\$6,970	\$23,780
University of Cincinnati-Clermont	\$6,364	\$24,750
University of Cincinnati-Main	\$13,176	\$30,166
Warren County Career Center	\$11,633	\$30,620

## 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

<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.

<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.

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 Southwest Ohio that are receiving grants and scholarships from federal-, state-, and institution-level sources. The majority of students at these nine colleges and universities are receiving some sort of grant aid; the source varies dramatically by each institution. The proportion of low-income students receiving Pell grants, for example, ranges from 55 percent at Cincinnati State Technical and Community Colleges to 11 percent at the University of Miami – Oxford. 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 Miami University - Oxford, where 91 percent of students receive some sort of financial aid from the institution itself (i.e. , Miami Merit Scholarships, the Ohio Governor’s Scholarship, etc.)<sup>8</sup>

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

<b>Institution</b>	<b>% receiving any aid</b>	<b>% Pell</b>	<b>% State aid</b>	<b>% institutional aid</b>
Butler Technology and Career Development Schools	37%	20%	7%	0%
Cincinnati State Tech and Community College	99%	55%	2%	30%
Great Oaks Career Campuses	67%	40%	12%	0%
Miami University-Hamilton	83%	36%	21%	51%
Miami University-Middletown	88%	39%	28%	54%
Miami University-Oxford	96%	11%	6%	91%
University of Cincinnati-Blue Ash	86%	42%	1%	52%

<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> Miami University Scholarships for Undergraduate Students:  
<https://miamioh.edu/admission-aid/costs-financial-aid/scholarships.html>

<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.



University of Cincinnati-Clermont	89%	42%	1%	60%
University of Cincinnati-Main	84%	20%	12%	52%
Warren County Career Center	73%	16%	4%	6%

## 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 Southwest Ohio who take on federal student loan debt. On average, loan amounts among those who choose to take on debt range from approximately \$5,000 to \$7,000.

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

Institution	% with loans	Average loan amount
Butler Technology and Career Development Schools	27%	\$6,457
Cincinnati State Tech and Community College	39%	\$6,069
Great Oaks Career Campuses	52%	\$7,087
Miami University-Hamilton	40%	\$4,857
Miami University-Middletown	45%	\$5,145
Miami University-Oxford	41%	\$5,306
University of Cincinnati-Blue Ash	41%	\$4,735
University of Cincinnati-Clermont	43%	\$4,982
University of Cincinnati-Main	49%	\$5,292
Warren County Career Center	32%	\$5,629

## 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

<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.

<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.

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 he or she spends 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 Southwest Ohio one-year after they earn their credential. Earnings at all eight 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 Southwest Ohio with only a high school diploma.

**Table 4: Median Earnings Ten Years Post-Grad – Southwest Ohio Public Institutions<sup>12</sup>**

Institution	Median 10-year earnings
Butler Technology and Career Development Schools	\$53,971
Cincinnati State Technical and Community College	\$40,697
Great Oaks Career Campuses	\$55,462
Miami University-Hamilton	\$60,039
Miami University-Middletown	\$60,039
Miami University-Oxford	\$60,039
University of Cincinnati-Blue Ash	\$55,281
University of Cincinnati-Clermont	\$55,281
University of Cincinnati-Main	\$55,281
Warren County Career Center	N/A

## 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 Southwest 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 Southwest 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

<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.

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 Southwest 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 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 Southwest 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.