

APPRENTICESHIP STUDENT FUNDING RESOURCES

FROM GENERAL STUDIES TO APPRENTICESHIPS

This guidance document is intended for counselors, advisors, and frontline staff at California community colleges and K-12 institutions who support students entering apprenticeship pathways. It outlines key considerations and strategies to help those working directly with students to provide clear, accurate information when exploring apprenticeship as a next step in their education and career journey.

A student can enter an apprenticeship either as a new participant or as an incumbent worker. Students can only be registered as apprentices after they have secured employment in the related occupation and begun apprenticeship coursework in a program registered with the Division of Apprenticeship Standards (DAS). According to the California Education Code ([EDC § 76350](#)), student apprentices registered in a DAS-approved Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP) do not have to pay tuition or attendance fees for community college coursework related to their apprenticeship program. For staff advising students, it is important to emphasize that tuition-free coursework begins only after full registration as an apprentice with DAS is complete.

This resource outlines key policies, financial aid impacts, and support considerations for advising students on timing, enrollment, and sequencing as they transition between General Education (GE), apprenticeship training, and longer-term academic pathways.

NON-APPRENTICESHIP COURSEWORK AND ACADEMIC PATHWAYS DURING APPRENTICESHIP

Students may continue progressing toward certificates, associate degrees, or baccalaureate degrees while completing an apprenticeship, depending on their schedule and course availability. While apprenticeship courses are tuition-free when a student is registered as an apprentice, unless GE courses are approved as RSI courses, GE degree requirements and prerequisite courses might not be tuition-free, even for students in RAPs. When planned thoughtfully, combining apprenticeship training with academic coursework or sequencing them strategically can help reduce the overall cost of education and support long-term career mobility.

Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) may also be an option for apprenticeship students.

Under Title 5 §55050, colleges may award credit for apprenticeship training, on-the-job learning, or related work experience. CPL may be applied either before entering an apprenticeship, to satisfy prerequisites or courses, or after completing the apprenticeship, when transitioning into a degree program. Leveraging CPL can reduce time and cost to completion, recognize and validate skills gained through paid experience, and create a smoother transition between apprenticeship and college pathways. More information about CPL is available through [Mapping Articulated Pathways \(MAP\)](#).

Staff should assist students in identifying which courses qualify as tuition-free apprenticeship coursework versus courses with associated costs, and support them in selecting the best pathway and appropriate financial aid options for cost-bearing courses.

FEDERAL AND STATE FINANCIAL AID CONSIDERATIONS

Since apprenticeship coursework may not cover all requirements for a certificate or degree, students may need to complete additional GE or prerequisite courses, which may necessitate financial support. In such cases, federal and state financial aid can be important resources. It is important to note that they vary in award amount and requirements. RAPs are a form of employment with paid wages, which are considered in financial aid calculations and could reduce overall aid eligibility.

Some elements of apprenticeship pathways, such as pre-apprenticeship programs, might be designated as noncredit, meaning they do not count toward the credit-unit minimums required for many financial aid programs. As a result, some students may find it advantageous to complete their pre-apprenticeship program first and subsequently enroll in credit-bearing coursework, thereby expanding access to additional financial aid and campus support resources.

Noncredit enrollments may impact:

- Student enrollment status (full-time, half-time)
- Prorated financial aid award amounts
- Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP)

To determine eligibility for financial aid, students who are U.S. citizens, permanent residents, or eligible non-citizens should complete the [Free Application for Federal Student Aid \(FAFSA\)](#). Undocumented students, AB 540–eligible students, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients, and U-Visa or TPS holders should complete the [California Dream Act Application \(CADAA\)](#). These applications do not provide financial aid themselves; rather, they are used to determine eligibility for federal, state, and institutional aid that may help pay for eligible credit-bearing coursework, depending on the program and enrollment status.

Included below are the most common types of federal and state financial aid available to help students progress toward their certificates or degrees.

Pell Grants (Federal)

Federal Pell Grants are awarded based on financial need, determined by the FAFSA using factors such as income, household size, and cost of attendance. While there is no fixed income cutoff, higher wage levels will generally reduce eligibility. The maximum Federal Pell Grant award for the 2026–27 award year is \$7,395. To qualify, students must complete the FAFSA, be enrolled in an eligible program, demonstrate financial need, maintain satisfactory academic progress, and must not have already earned a bachelor's or professional degree or exceeded the 12-term (or equivalent) lifetime eligibility limit.

Work-Study (Federal)

Workforce Pell is a federal financial aid program administered through the U.S. Department of Education that expands federal Pell Grant eligibility to students enrolled in approved short-term workforce training programs that lead to high skill, high-wage, in-demand occupations. Students apply through the FAFSA, and eligibility and award amounts are determined based on their financial aid status. Grant funds are then sent to the participating college on the student's behalf and applied toward eligible educational expenses, such as tuition and fees. [Eligibility for Workforce Pell](#) funding requires the program to be between 8 and 15 weeks in length, consist of 150 to 599 instructional hours, lead to employment in high-demand careers, and be approved by both the state Governor and the U.S. Secretary of Education.

Cal Grant (State)

Cal Grants are awarded based on financial need, GPA, and FAFSA or CADAA eligibility, with income and asset ceilings that vary by award type. Most awards require at least half-time enrollment, and the maximum Cal Grant award at community colleges is \$1,648. To qualify, students must submit a FAFSA or CADAA with a verified GPA, demonstrate financial need, and must not have already earned a bachelor's or professional degree. Cal Grants are generally available for up to four years of full-time attendance (or equivalent).

California College Promise Grant (State)

The California College Promise Grant (CCPG) waives the standard \$46-per-unit enrollment fee for eligible California residents at community colleges. Eligibility is calculated based on income, household size, and information submitted via the FAFSA or CADAA. To qualify, students must meet academic standards, including maintaining a 2.0 GPA and completing more than 50% of attempted coursework.

Financial aid eligibility and award amounts remain dependent on the number of credit units a student is enrolled in, among other factors, and submitting a financial aid application does not guarantee an award.

COMMUNITY-BASED SUPPORT

California Community Colleges offer a variety of [support services](#) to promote student retention and success. Staff should assist students in exploring **additional support programs**, such as:

- Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS)
- Disabled Students Programs and Services (DSPS)
- Federal TRIO Programs (TRIO)
- Veterans Services
- Foster Youth Programs

For educational or living expenses not covered by available financial aid, students may be eligible for supplemental assistance from external partners. Because these resources vary by region and provider, students and college staff are encouraged to research and consult reputable sources to identify programs and services available in their local area, such as local workforce development boards or community-based organizations that may have access to additional funding, including the [Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act \(WIOA\)](#), state and regional apprenticeship grants, and/or philanthropic funding. These resources are not guaranteed, and availability depends on program requirements.

STUDENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Students are strongly encouraged to maintain ongoing advising appointments as they transition between GE, apprenticeship training, and credit-bearing coursework to maintain alignment with long-term academic and career goals. Early planning and consistent support can make a significant difference in a student's experience and outcomes. Consistent communication with campus and program staff ensures students make informed enrollment decisions, avoid financial disruptions, and leverage the full spectrum of resources available to them as they navigate apprenticeship and college pathways.