Public Colleges and Universities

The terms “higher education” and “college” mean formal schooling beyond high school. In California, students may continue their education beyond high school in three different systems: the University of California (10 campuses), the California State University (23 campuses), and the California Community Colleges (118 campuses). These public institutions are supported with funds approved by the state legislature, student fees, and private donations.

Founded in 1857 to train teachers for the expanding frontier, San José State is the oldest public university in California. However, the framers of the 1849 State Constitution dreamed of creating a university that “would contribute even more than California’s gold to the glory and happiness of advancing generations.” Their thinking led to the state’s second oldest university in 1869, when the University of California at Berkeley welcomed its first students.

Both the University of California and the California State University began just after the Gold Rush. They became the largest and most distinguished system of public higher education in the world. In 1907, the state legislature started a third set of schools to focus on the first two years of college education. These schools grew into the Community Colleges located throughout California.

These public colleges and universities, along with many private institutions not shown on this map, are open to students of every age, ethnicity, and economic background. There are more options for higher education in California than in other states and countries around the world.