

BRCC “Cost of Attendance” Methodology

Purpose

Each college is required to estimate the “Cost of Attendance” (a.k.a. “COA”) for students attending their college. This COA must include not only the tuition and fee costs charged by the college, but estimates of room and board expenses, books, and supplies, transportation, and miscellaneous/personal expenses. In 2022, we conducted a periodic review to determine the most accurate estimate possible to assist in determining financial aid eligibility for our student population.

It is important to remember that students’ costs will vary greatly and that this COA is to be used only as a rough estimate or guideline. Each student will have a unique monthly set of expenses related to their particular cost of rent/mortgage, utilities, insurance, food, gas, etc.

Method

The Bureau of Labor and Statistics (BLS) produces an annual review of monthly spending per consumer unit. The BLS indicates that “A consumer unit consists of either: (1) all members of a particular household who are related by blood, marriage, adoption, or other legal arrangements; (2) a person living alone or sharing a household with others or living as a roomer in a private home or lodging house or in permanent living quarters in a hotel or motel, but who is financially independent; or (3) two or more persons living together who use their income to make joint expenditure decisions.”¹

The BLS cites the average spending per Consumer Unit per month in the United States is \$5113, broken down in the following chart:

Categories	Amount
Housing	1784
Transportation	819
Personal insurance and pensions	604
Healthcare	431
Groceries	412
Entertainment	243
Meals away from home	198
Cash contributions	190
Apparel and services	120
Education	106
Miscellaneous	76
Personal care	54
Alcoholic beverages	40
Tobacco/smoking products	26
Reading	10
TOTAL	5113

¹ “Overview.” *U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics*, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1 Dec. 2021, <https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/consumer-expenditures/2020/home.htm>.

To Assess the COA for students attending BRCC, we began by removing the categories that were not allowable in a federal COA, leaving the following items:

Categories	Amount
Housing	1784
Transportation	819
Healthcare	431
Groceries	412
Apparel and services	120
Miscellaneous	76
Personal care	54
Reading	10
TOTAL	3706

Combined into the federally recognized COA categories, this left an allowable academic year (9 month) Cost of Living as follows:

Total allowable ACADEMIC YEAR COL for Consumer in our service region (US amount times average COLI in service region)	
Room and Board	18731
Transportation	6985.9
Miscellaneous/Personal	5894.1
Total	31611

The Cost of Living Index is a measure that determined how an area compares to the national average in the area of living costs. It is measured by a percentage. For example, a COLI of 90 would indicate that an area’s costs are approximately 90 percent of the average cost for the nation. The following demonstrates the COLI for our local areas ^{2 3 4}

Cost of Living Index (COLI) in our service area	
Staunton	94.5
Harrisonburg	95.5
Rockingham County	98.6
Augusta County	90.5
AVERAGE	94.78

² AdvisorSmith. “Home.” *AdvisorSmith*, 5 June 2020, <https://advisorsmith.com/data/coli/>.

³ “Cost of Living & Housing.” *Rockingham County VA Economic Development - Cost of Living & Housing*, <http://www.yesrockingham.com/Living-Here/Cost-of-Living-Housing.aspx>.

⁴ “Housing.” *Augusta County Economic Development*, 14 Jan. 2022, <https://augustavabusiness.com/augusta-living/housing/>.

Using an average COLI for our service region of 94.78, the total monthly cost is reduced as follows:

Total allowable monthly COL for Consumer Unit in our service region (US amount times average COLI in service region)	
Room and Board	2081
Transportation	776
Miscellaneous/Personal	655
Total	3512

Because the COLI is based on a “consumer unit,” which could be an individual or a family, this artificially inflates the cost for an individual’s living expenses. Using the assumption that a student is likely to share expenses with at least 1 roommate, spouse, or partner, the final model for monthly COL divides the “Room and Board” line item in half, leaving “miscellaneous/personal” and “transportation” at the levels established by the average local COLI.

Total allowable monthly COL for student in our service region (US amount times average COLI in service region), ASSUMING Room/Board with one roommate	
Room and Board	1041
Transportation	776
Miscellaneous/Personal	736
Total	2552

Using the numbers established by the BLS COLI, we have built our 9 month full-time off-campus, not-with-family, in-state COA (Cost of Attendance) which also accounts for 15 credits of tuition per semester and \$600 per semester of books.

Complete Full-Time, In-State COA for Student Not Living With Parent	
Tuition and Fees	5364
Books and Supplies	1200
Room and Board	9366
Transportation	6985
Miscellaneous/Personal	5894
Total	28809

The alternate version for an out-of-state student is as follows:

Complete Full-Time, Out-of-State COA for Student Not Living With Parent	
Tuition and Fees	11292
Books and Supplies	1200
Room and Board	9366
Transportation	6985
Miscellaneous/Personal	5894
Total	34737

While students living off campus with family will have some living, transportation, and miscellaneous expenses, we recognize that their room and board will be smaller than that of a student living apart from family. Therefore, the corresponding COA for students living with family include 50% the room and board expense of a student not living with family, as follows:

Complete Full-Time, Out-of-State COA for Student Not Living With Parent	
Tuition and Fees	11292
Books and Supplies	1200
Room and Board	9366
Transportation	6985
Miscellaneous/Personal	5894
Total	34737

Complete Full-Time, Out-of-State COA for Student Living With Parent	
Tuition and Fees	11292
Books and Supplies	1200
Room and Board	4683
Transportation	6985
Miscellaneous/Personal	5894
Total	30054