Certificates: An Underappreciated Credential

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Certificates Are a Growing Option

- The number of certificates awarded has skyrocketed more than 800 percent over the past 30 years. In 1984, less than 2 percent of adults 18 and older had a certificate as their highest educational attainment; by 2009, the percentage grew to almost 12 percent.
- Twenty-four percent of workers report having attended a vocational, technical, trade, or business program.
- Eighteen percent earned a certificate, and one-third of this group also earned an Associate’s or Bachelor’s degree.
- One-third of those that had a higher degree earned their certificate after they had their degree.
Certificate Programs Vary in Length

- Short-term certificates require less than one year of instructional time.
- Medium-term certificates require one to two years of instructional time.
- Long-term certificates require two to four years of instructional time.
- Some states have found that short-term certificates don’t provide a large earnings boost over the earnings of HS graduates. But this hasn’t been validated nationally.
Certificates Can be Earned Throughout a Career

While 44 percent of certificate holders earned their credential by age 22, 34 percent earned them after 30.
Certificates Focus on Training for Middle-Skill Jobs

- Women who earn certificates are concentrated in just a few fields: health care (37 percent), business and office management (28 percent), cosmetology (21 percent), and computers/IT (9 percent).
- Male certificate holders vary more by field than women: auto mechanics (18 percent), construction trades (15 percent), electronics (12 percent), 8 percent each in computers/IT and metal working, and 7 percent each in refrigeration/heating and air conditioning and transportation and materials moving.
- There are very few fields that aren’t dominated by one gender (80 percent or more).
The Payoff from Certificates Is Very Uneven with Men Getting a Much Bigger Boost than Women

Extra Earnings that Certificate Holders Have over HS grads

- All Women: 16%
- White: 14%
- African-American: 11%
- Hispanic: 41%
- All Men: 27%
- White: 21%
- African-American: 27%
- Hispanic: 44%
- Asian/Other: 24%
Field of Study Matters a Lot

- Aviation
- Refrigeration, Heating, or Air Conditioning
- Drafting
- Electronics
- Metal Working
- Construction Trades
- Police/Protective Services
- Transportation and Materials Moving
- Agriculture/Forestry
- Auto mechanics
- Computer/IT
- Business/Office Management
- Health Care
- Food Service
- Cosmetology

$0 $10,000 $20,000 $30,000 $40,000 $50,000 $60,000
Working in Field is also Very Important

- **Women**
  - HS Diploma Only
  - Certificate Not Working in Field
  - Certificate Working in Field
  - AA Degree

- **Men**
  - HS Diploma Only
  - Certificate Not Working in Field
  - Certificate Working in Field
  - AA Degree

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
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<td>HS Diploma Only</td>
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