

NEW REPORT CONFIRMS SOME POSTSECONDARY CERTIFICATES WILL PAY OFF MORE THAN FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE DEGREES

Study also finds that the United States would move from 15th to 10th in the international rankings of postsecondary attainment if certificates were included in government statistics

(Washington, D.C., June 6, 2012) – A new study by the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce shows that certificates are the fastest growing form of postsecondary credentials in the U.S., increasing from six percent of postsecondary awards in 1980 to 22 percent of awards today. Their growth is due in part to the fact that they are affordable, they usually take less than a year to complete and they often yield high returns.

The study also shows that certificates have become a stepping stone to college degrees. Twenty percent of certificate holders go on to get two year degrees and an additional 13 percent ultimately get a Bachelor's degrees.

Certificates can outperform two year and four year degrees. On average workers with certificates earn 20 percent more than workers with only high school diplomas. For example:

- Male certificate holders earn more than 40 percent of men with Associate's degrees and 24 percent of men with Bachelor's degrees.
- Female certificate holders earn more than 34 percent of the women with Associate's degrees and 24 percent of women with Bachelor's degrees.

The value of the certificate is tied to being in the right field, and working in that field. On average certificate holders who work in field earn 37 percent more than those who work out of field. The highest earners are those who are working in field and in high-demand occupations, for instance:

- Men who work in computer/information services earn \$72,498 per year, which is more than 72 percent of men with an Associate's degree and 54 percent of men with a Bachelor's degree.
- Women working in the same field earn \$56,664, which is greater than 75 percent of women with an Associate's degree and 64 percent of women with a Bachelor's degree.

Despite the growing importance of certificates – 1 million were awarded in 2010, up from 300,000 in 1994 –they are rarely counted in government surveys. If certificates, with a demonstrated labor market value, were counted, they would increase the United States' international ranking from 15th to 10th among industrialized nations.

"Certificates don't work for everyone," said Anthony P. Carnevale, the Center's director and the report's lead author. "Certificates are the cutting edge for Hispanic educational and income gains, they provide big payoffs for men but not for women, especially African-American women."

- Certificates provide more bang for the buck for men than women. Men who earn certificates earn 27 percent more than high school-educated men. Women with a certificate, by comparison, only receive an average 16 percent increase in earnings over women with a high school diploma.
- Certificates provide higher economic payoff for those with less educational preparation. Students who enroll in certificate programs and have lower standardized test scores receive similar wages as workers with some college.

Growth of certificates is strongest in the South and West. Kentucky, Arizona, Georgia, Louisiana, and Florida produce the most certificates among states per population. In Oklahoma, 18 percent of workers have certificates as their highest level of education; in Nebraska, only 6 percent do.

Certificates: Gateway to Gainful Employment and College Degrees is comprised of a full report and an executive summary, both documents are available online at <http://cew.georgetown.edu/certificates>

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