

Attending College as an **Adult**

*What it Means to Attend College as an Adult
and Growing Trends in the Marketplace*

Attending College as an Adult

As each year passes, we are seeing an increase in the number of adult learners take a first, second, or third pass at college. These adult learners (defined as over 22 years of age) are focused, talented, and eager learners. What else do we know about this growing demographic of adult learner? We will peek under the hood to understand the heart of the issue, data, motivation, and how you can benefit from this trend to positively impact your career trajectory as an adult learner.

The research team at EduVentures predicts the number of adult learners will reach 5 million students by 2020. As you will read in the pages to come, there has been a substantial and statistically relevant shift in adult learning in the past few years.

This begs the question: *how will you respond to these shifts to upskill and remain competitive in your career?*

Read on to learn more about the data behind these important trends in the marketplace.

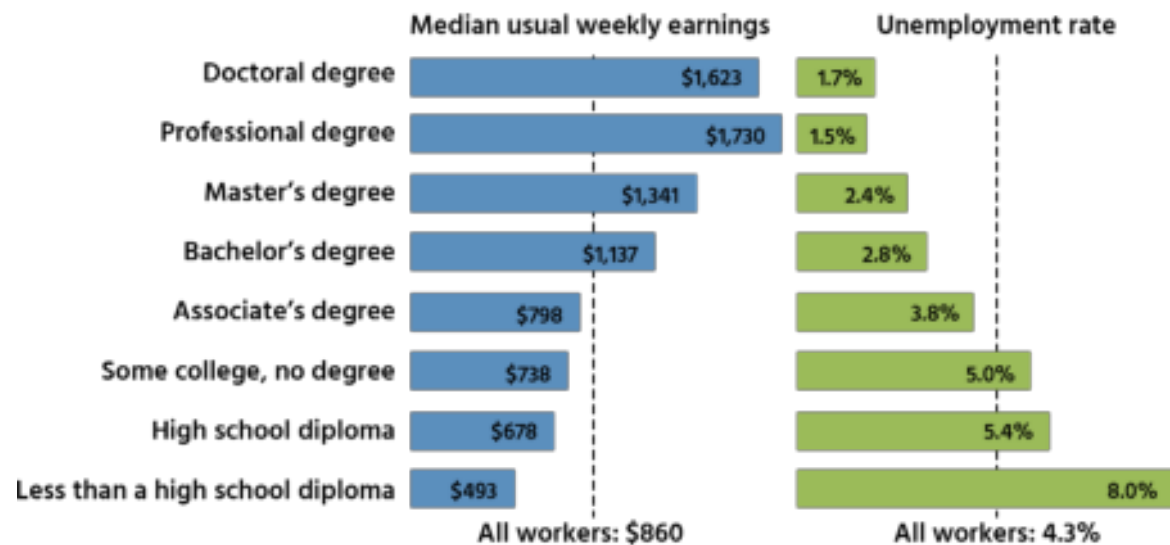


The Value of College

It is widely understood there is a direct correlation between education, income, and employment stability. The United States Department of Labor recently updated a massive study that concluded a direct link between earnings and employment rates by educational attainment. In real terms, you can see from the study a person who has earned a bachelor degree earns 130% more than a person without a high school diploma and enjoys nearly 3 times the job stability. Suffice it to say there is real, measurable difference between having an advanced degree and not having a college degree.

With each successive degree, income increases and job stability improves. Given this expansive research project by the federal government, there has never been a more compelling set of data to support the value of higher education in the United States.

Earnings and unemployment rates by educational attainment, 2015



Note: Data are for persons age 25 and over. Earnings are for full-time wage and salary workers.
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey



A Demographic Shift

The Gates Foundation recently published data depicting a marked demographic shift in the United States. Their study attempted to simplify a complex set of data by quantifying America as 100 college students. Here is a summary of their findings:



Gender: Split 56% female and 44% male versus a previously male dominated college landscape of a previous generation.

Age: Adult learners comprise 47% of the total college population today. This represents a sea change in the recent past where college was once dominated by students under 22 years of age.

Learning Environment: Fully 27% of adult learners are enrolled in an online course which was only recently offered by colleges.

Race: A total of 43% of enrolled college students are non-white adding to the diversity on and off campus.

Enrollment: Only 63% of college students attend full-time leaving 37% that attend on a part-time basis.

Employment: Approximately 62% of enrolled college students work while attending school.

Financial Aid: Nearly forty percent of enrolled students receive Pell Grants.

Housing: A mere 41% of enrolled college students live on-campus.

Dependents: Nearly 30% of students enrolled in a college program have children.

In summary, we are seeing a greater percentage of working adults from diverse backgrounds attend college than ever before.


The Evolution of the Employment Market

Professionals of all stripes acknowledge an ever-evolving trend in the workplace in that additional educational credentials are requisite for advancement. Need proof? The American Institutes for Research (AIR) published a [report](#) indicating a near doubling of professionals with a higher education degree inside a generation. This is compelling evidence of the importance of postsecondary education for adult learners in today's marketplace.

Pearson recently completed a broad-based survey of [adult learners](#) revealing this trend in higher education will continue to evolve. A few of the major take-aways from the survey include:

- Nearly 75% of those surveyed will need additional education to keep up with the changes in their field in the next five years.
- Half of the respondents indicated the primary reason to go back to school or continue their education was rooted in improving earning potential.
- Fully 68% of adult learners are likely to enroll in a degree program or certificate program in the next five years.
- Eight of 10 of those surveyed cited tuition and fees as the primary barrier for enrolling in a college program.
- An overwhelming majority of respondents seek an educational provider that offers valuable skill-building and useful knowledge for the job market of the future.
- The top sectors of interest for adult learners include [healthcare](#), [information technology](#), and [business management](#).

The survey goes on to illuminate the perception of job security, morphing from a traditional mentality to growing concerns over technological advancements.



Approximately 70% of respondents believe they will need additional education to keep up in their industry and that technology advancements will significantly alter their job in the future.

How Higher Education is Adapting for Adult Learners

Adult learners are the fastest growing demographic in postsecondary studies.

This trend is driven by a need to:

1. *Remain Competitive*
2. *Improve Earning Power*
3. *Upskill to Help Advance Careers*

Colleges and universities across the country are meeting this demand by rolling out [online learning](#) courses and emerging learning [models](#) driven by *demand-development and upskilling*.

Commonly accepted learning model of the prior generation was for students to acquire the bulk of their knowledge and skills at the beginning of a career. Today, the expectation is for adult learners to be continually adding new skills. This is a big philosophical change and one that needs your attention.

The education industry is meeting these evolving needs through online learning modules, boot camps, certificate programs, credentials, credit for prior learning, and new degree programs to help adult learners' upskill more effectively. Underscoring this evolution is the fact nearly 1/3 of enrolled students took part in at least one online learning course. If you are on the fence about investing in your future through higher education, dig into the data and think about how to become future-ready in your field.

Adult learners are voting with their time and money by investing in accredited college programs and professional certificate programs to advance their careers. Find out if this makes sense for you by studying the facts, engaging professionals in your field, and charting a course with your mentor to prepare for what's to come.