

Connecting Higher Education To The Workforce Of Tomorrow

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America is experiencing unprecedented accelerating change rivaling the Industrial Revolution in its magnitude and speed. Game-changing advances such as artificial intelligence and machine learning are poised to upend many traditional career paths. This fast-moving societal transformation will require workers to embrace life-long learning, skills training and continuous education to stay abreast of emerging career opportunities in a global economy powered by digital technologies.

Experts say that, unlike prior generations, today's workers should plan for [as many as seven](#) distinct careers over the course of their working lives. This will require continuous investment in education and training to stay relevant at work.

The paradox we face is that, while education and training are essential to our future as a nation, a growing number of Americans have come to question the value of a traditional college degree. In fact, the [number of U.S. undergraduates enrolled](#) in a four-year college degree program peaked in 2010-2011 at 18.1 million and as of fall 2022 had fallen to just under 15.1 million. With the tightest labor market in half a century, millions of attractive entry-level jobs are now accessible to high school graduates without any degree requirement whatsoever.

The U.S. government is committing significant resources to ensure the next generation is prepared for the needs of the 21st-century workforce, including the advancement of real-life work experience, offering college credits and progress toward an industry credential. This career-connected approach to education hopes to build skills-based learning and training pathways for high school students, including

apprenticeships in key growth industries such as advanced manufacturing, healthcare, automotive and cybersecurity.

What steps must colleges and universities take to ensure their essential leadership in preparing America's next generation for career success and to be engaged leaders in their respective communities?

- First, institutions of every size must have a global perspective. The problems we face and the solutions they require are increasingly and insistently international. Colleges and universities that only look inward simply are not preparing students for the realities of the world they are entering. Across our six institutions, TCS Education System has developed more than 200 global experiences to date. And it is these program experiences that our students count as some of their most transformative and essential.
- Institutions must also acknowledge the toll the pandemic took on student mental health by stepping up programs that promote inclusiveness and prepare students to feel mentally, socially and academically prepared for the stresses of college life.
- Colleges need to work hard to improve retention rates. More than 39 million Americans attended college in recent years but failed to complete their degree or other credential, an avoidable tragedy for them and for society. Most institutions have now put in place stronger early warning systems to identify these struggling students and intervene early to improve their likelihood of completing their degree or certificate.
- In response to the growing demand for life-long learning, colleges should expand their programs to meet the needs of adult students. Many of these students are coming back to school for targeted, modular programs directly connected to current or new career opportunities. These mid-career students require flexible programs as they are often juggling family needs and working part-time or full-time jobs in addition to pursuing their education.
- Microcredentials have become an increasingly popular education alternative for many students. These short, skills-focused programs are typically aimed at careers in high-demand sectors such as healthcare.

These certificate programs create an excellent blueprint for workers to follow in response to the need to build new skills continuously throughout a career to remain relevant in the workplace.

- More institutions today are also offering programs that reduce the time it takes to complete a traditional bachelor's or associate's degree. These intensive programs enable students to complete their degree more quickly and move faster toward achieving their career goals.

Despite growing alternatives to traditional higher education, research shows that a college degree remains the best path to a successful career in America. According to the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, [college graduates](#) can expect to command a 25% wage premium within just a year of graduation over their peers. Over a lifetime, this translates to median earnings of \$2.8 million, versus \$1.6 million for those lacking a degree.

Beyond just earnings power, a college experience instills immeasurable life skills that include critical thinking and team building, the ability to engage with opinions and perspectives distinct from one's own, project management, strategic planning and research. Other benefits include the establishment of valuable life-long relationships, a broad world perspective through study abroad programs, access to cutting-edge tools and technologies that will advance skills, and valuable and practical hands-on career prep experience in diverse settings through internships.

While attitudes for some have changed about the long-term value of a college degree, millions of people continue to believe that higher education is a critical component of their life plan for personal growth and career development.

For generations, college has been one of America's most iconic milestones for students seeking to advance their career goals and achieve their life dreams. To remain relevant in today's changing environment, colleges are evolving their approach to meeting the needs of students and helping them advance their prospects for long-term career success.