



# Path to Career Success Doesn't Necessarily Lead to a University

By Laura Byrnes, APR, CPRC



Show of hands, how many of you still think of a four-year college degree when you think of higher education?

If that sounds about right, then allow me to say for the umpteenth gazillion time, it's time to put hire education in your higher education.

We've been repeating this for years, and maybe you're sick of hearing it. But this summer, Georgetown University's McCourt School of Public Policy's Center on Education and the Workforce came out with a new study that confirms that a bachelor's degree isn't the only path to career success.

I first noticed the study in a Chicago Tribune story that concludes "... the four-year degree doesn't guarantee top pay ... 28 percent of people who get associate degrees from community colleges end up with better jobs than those with bachelor's degrees."

I'm not saying there is anything wrong with going to one of our fine universities, or starting at a college and transferring to a four-year institution, if that's where your career path leads you.

But it isn't the *only* path to success.

According to the study, while the national decline in the manufacturing economy eliminated many good jobs for high school graduates, there are still 30 million good jobs in the U.S. that pay well without a BA. These good jobs have median earning of \$55,000 and are changing from traditional blue-collar industries to skilled-service industries.

I don't like to say, "I told you so," but, well ... I told you so.

Let's start with the numbers. Florida jobs forecasted for 2018 by education level suggest that 5.6 million or 59 percent of all projected jobs require postsecondary credentials. Of those, more than half – 3.06 million or 54.6 percent – require some college, certificate or associate's degree, while 2.54 million or 45 percent require a four-year or graduate degree.

Florida ranks third behind California and Texas in providing the largest number of good jobs for workers without a BA, the study found.

Comparing 2018 and 2008, we are seeing projected growth statewide in new jobs and jobs created through attrition at all education levels, which is both a good thing and expected/hoped for as we continue to recover from the recession. But we are specifically seeing the greatest growth among those requiring postsecondary training.

Thanks to increased awareness and availability of high school programs and academies that graduate students with industry-ready certifications – programs that will be highlighted, by the way, through the Career Awareness Talent Pipeline video project in partnership with Duke Energy – we're seeing an uptick in the number of jobs for high school graduates.

We've also partnered once again with the Marion County Public Schools, Public Education Foundation of Marion County, Ocala/Marion County Chamber and Economic Partnership and Mid-Florida Regional Manufacturers Association to offer an expanded Youth Career Expo here early next year. The expo for middle school students takes place Feb. 13, 2018 and the one for high schoolers is on Feb. 14, 2018. We'll hold an expo the evening of February 13 that is dedicated to private school/parochial students, parents and others. They all take place at the Circle Square Cultural Center.

These expos provide a fantastic experience which includes three distinct sessions in rotation: a traditional "career fair" with area employers, roundtable discussions with industry representatives and an interactive, soft-skills workshop.

If you've ever said to yourself, I sure wish today's students understood the opportunities we offer and can learn about training/education for the skills my business needs, then you'll want to participate in these expos.

Here's something else to consider: during this year's expos, we had 100 percent of all Marion County public schools participate. The students were selected by their schools – so it's not just a field-trip, these kids earned the right to attend. There were 421 middle schoolers and 376 high schoolers.

Industry sector/representation included health, manufacturing/logistics, IT, public service and others. Twenty-one employers and five education partners participated in the middle school expo and 30 employers and eight education partners took part in the high school expo.

What we've been telling students through our career exploration programs is that a clear path to career success exists right here in Marion County for those who wish to earn a one-year or 18-month certificate at say, Marion Technical College or Marion Technical Institute, which can be parlayed into a two-year degree at the College of Central Florida,

which can be used toward a bachelor's degree, often available online and certainly within the region and state.

We talk a lot about manufacturing and the Georgetown University study points out that nationally, the "blue collar economy" has shifted away from manufacturing and left workers behind. But as we've also noted, clean, green, high-tech manufacturing is robust and growing within our region, with a growing number of opportunities and better than average right here in Marion County. The most recent employment data for the Ocala metropolitan statistical area (which covers all of the county), shows that the area continues to rank among the state's top metro areas in manufacturing job growth. Data released September 15 indicates that there are 8,300 manufacturing jobs in the Ocala metro, up from 7,900 a year ago. That's a 5.1 percent job growth rate, a virtual tie with Cape Coral 5.3 percent for the fifth fastest growing rate in Florida. That outpaces the state average growth rate in manufacturing of 3.1 percent.

But here's what you should also know: When we talk about opportunities that don't require a bachelor's degree, we're talking about good jobs in skilled-services industries, such as healthcare and information technology.

For example, education and health services, which employ 19,000 in the Ocala metro, added 600 new jobs over the year boasting a 3.3 percent growth rate. That also grew faster over the year in the metro area than the statewide 2.2 percent rate.

Local high school programs in healthcare and IT that provide training and, at minimum a launching off point, will be highlighted as well in the Duke-sponsored video series.

The message about the importance and local availability of postsecondary training – even that which does not include a four-year degree – is one that needs to be driven home, and one that can't be repeated often enough. We hope you'll help CareerSource CLM and our partners share that message and take part in career awareness efforts to build your talent pipeline.

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