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Jobs Forecast Predicts Increasing Need for College Degrees

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by [*Jamaal Abdul-Alim*](#)

The vast majority of American jobs in the next few years will require some type of post-secondary training or degree, meaning that post-secondary education is becoming the primary gateway into the middle class, a top labor economist said Tuesday.

“It’s fair to say we’ve come to the point where we’ve been headed for quite some time,” said Anthony Carnevale, director of the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce.

“What we’re seeing here is a gradual upskilling,” Carnevale said presenting a new report, *Help Wanted: Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements through 2018*, at the National Press Club for a discussion in which he was joined by co-panelists from the private sector, the American Federation of Teachers national and the U.S. Department of Education.

The report states that 63 percent of all job openings in 2018 – from positions in health care to office management – will require workers to have at least some college education and will, for the most part, pay more than those that don’t.

High school dropouts will have an increasingly tough time in the future, the report states, with many being concentrated in lower-paying jobs in the industries of leisure and hospitality (28 percent), wholesale and retail trade (14 percent), and construction (13 percent), essentially catering to, serving and building structures for their better-educated and, consequently, better-paid peers.

The predictions are based on a projection methodology that, among other things, assumes the best indicator of the demand for education is the current distribution of education among today's employed "prime-age" workers. The methodology differs from that used by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the report states, in a number of ways, including that the BLS methodology holds educational demand constant.

Asked if the report's assumptions hold true in light of stories such as one in the *Washington Post* Tuesday that noted a trend of bachelor's degree-holders ending up in jobs for which their education was not required, Carnevale dismissed such news reports as sensationalized novelties.

"In the end, that's a 'man bites dog' story," Carnevale said. "It makes good reading."

Unskilled jobs will decline

He said his data show that jobs requiring bachelor's degrees or more are "a little stronger" in growth than jobs that require less education, with 23 percent of all jobs projected to require a bachelor's degree or better in 2018, up from 21 percent in 2007. Jobs requiring an associate's degree are expected to rise from 10 percent in 2007 to 12 percent in 2018, and jobs requiring some college or no degree are expected to remain flat at 17 percent. Jobs requiring a high school diploma, meanwhile, are expected to decline from their 2007 level of 30 percent to 28 percent in 2018, and jobs for high school dropouts are also expected to decline from 11 percent to 10 percent during the same period, according to the report.

Carnevale says the data are reason to ignore news accounts of people working jobs that don't match their education.

"It's a recession, so these stories are going to pop up," Carnevale said. "What troubles me about them is people read them and young people or their parents make the wrong decisions."

Carnevale's research is supported by two philanthropic foundations with major pro-post-secondary agenda: The Lumina Foundation for Education and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Carnevale's findings regarding educational requirements largely mirror Lumina Foundation's Goal 2025 initiative, which seeks to have 60 percent of Americans with "high-quality" degrees and credentials by the year 2025. The Gates Foundation has a similar initiative to "double the numbers" of young Americans who earn post-secondary degrees with value in the labor market.

The Obama administration has made it a goal to make the American workforce the best-educated in the world by 2020.

Dewayne Matthews, vice president of policy and strategy for the Lumina Foundation, said that the Lumina grant that supported Carnevale's work was the "single most important" grant that Lumina has ever made and said that he had no apologies to other Lumina grantees.

"That's music to my ears," Carnevale said after Matthews' remarks.

Despite the fact that Carnevale's research – conducted in conjunction with his fellow researchers at the Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce, Nicole Smith and Jeff Strohl – leads to conclusions that support the agenda of the study's primary backers, the study was portrayed as being useful on a practical level, especially for those who provide education and employment counseling to youths.

Confronting a global economy

Co-panelist [Drew Greenblatt, owner of Marlin Steel Wire Products in Baltimore, Md.](#), said the report is important because it shows the "tremendous need" to produce educated workers who can be of benefit to companies such as his, which he said are finding it increasingly difficult to compete when companies abroad pay their workers far less than American workers.

"For me to beat China at 30 cents an hour, we have to have a really [smart workforce](#), really clever people coming up with out-of-the-box, slick ideas," Greenblatt said, adding that more [innovative, and custom-made products](#) make customers more tolerant of higher prices.

"We really need smart people coming out of community college, [mechanical engineering](#) programs and high school," Greenblatt said, explaining that 20 percent of his workforce is engineers.

Co-panelist Martha Kanter, U.S. undersecretary of education, said the report shows the need for educators and policy-makers to do more to form a "marriage" between education and work. She espoused the virtues and benefits of internships, apprenticeships and full- and part-time work experiences that are relevant to a youth's post-secondary studies.

Although Carnevale's research took swipes at the BLS methodology of projecting educational requirements for jobs, saying it consistently undercounts the number of post-secondary degrees that will be needed in the future, no one from the U.S. Department of Labor was on the official panel.

Carnevale said his research is ultimately about the need for youths to get good college and career advice.

“In the end, what we’re talking about is all counseling,” Carnevale said, saying that most high school guidance counselors have such high caseloads that they are rendered ineffective.

“And a huge job counseling system will not be built,” Carnevale said. “If we’re not going to do it in high school, doing it in the labor market doesn’t seem likely to happen.”

He touted the need for an Internet-based counseling system “where you can look for a job and find what training you need to get the job.”

“For the most disadvantaged, disconnected youths, you still need a counselor,” Carnevale said.

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