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AACC Commends New Report on College Certificates Released by Georgetown University’s Center on Education and the Workforce

Community colleges across the country continue to dramatically expand and enhance their certificate programs. These education and training programs are generally one year or less in length and provide immediate employment opportunities as well as paths to further college programs. In light of this, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) commends the just-released report of Georgetown University’s Center on Education and the Workforce, *Certificates: Gateway to Gainful Employment and College Degrees*. [http://cew.georgetown.edu/certificates/](http://cew.georgetown.edu/certificates/) This report provides a detailed, timely analysis of the significance of certificate programs in today’s economy, and should help guide educators and policymakers.

Some of the report’s salient findings include

- Certificate degree holders earn, on average, 20% more than those possessing only a high school diploma—but, contrary to conventional wisdom, short-term certificates do not necessarily result in low-paying jobs; and longer-term certificates do not guarantee high pay.
- More than one third of all degree holders (associate, bachelors, or doctorate) also have earned a certificate.
- One third of all certificate awards are made to those age 30 or older, showing their importance for individuals currently in the workforce.
- Certificate attainment is particularly important for African-American students (among racial/ethnic groups, it represents the greatest percentage of the highest credential attained), while Hispanic students get the highest wage boost compared to those holding only a high school diploma.
- One fifth of all certificates at for-profit colleges are in the field of cosmetology; the net cost of these programs for students is nearly three times that at community colleges ($19,635 compared to $6,780).
- Certificate holders who procure jobs in their field of study derive much greater wage benefits than those who do not. Also, in part because of their preferred fields of study, women tend to receive less economic benefit from certificates than men.

The report cites a variety of statistics showing the differential earnings impact of various certificate programs. In this regard, AACC continues to advocate for providing institutions of higher education, states, and other entities greater access to data concerning the earnings of college completers, so that more comprehensive analyses of the impact of higher education can be undertaken.
AACC’s policy brief, *The Road Ahead: A Look at Trends in Educational Attainment of Community College Students*, [http://www.aacc.nche.edu/Publications/Briefs/Pages/pb09292011.aspx](http://www.aacc.nche.edu/Publications/Briefs/Pages/pb09292011.aspx) analyzes the growing role and importance of certificate programs being offered on community college campuses. Community colleges now award more than one certificate for every two associate degrees provided.

Earlier this year, the National Center for Education Statistics (*Beginning Subbaccalaureate Students’ Labor Market Experiences: Six Years Later in 2009* [http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2012/2012273.pdf](http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2012/2012273.pdf)) found that, compared to graduates from other sectors, a smaller percentage of community college certificate completers experienced unemployment, while a greater percentage were employed full-time, also earning higher salaries. In addition, community college certificate completers were likely to have greater job satisfaction.

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