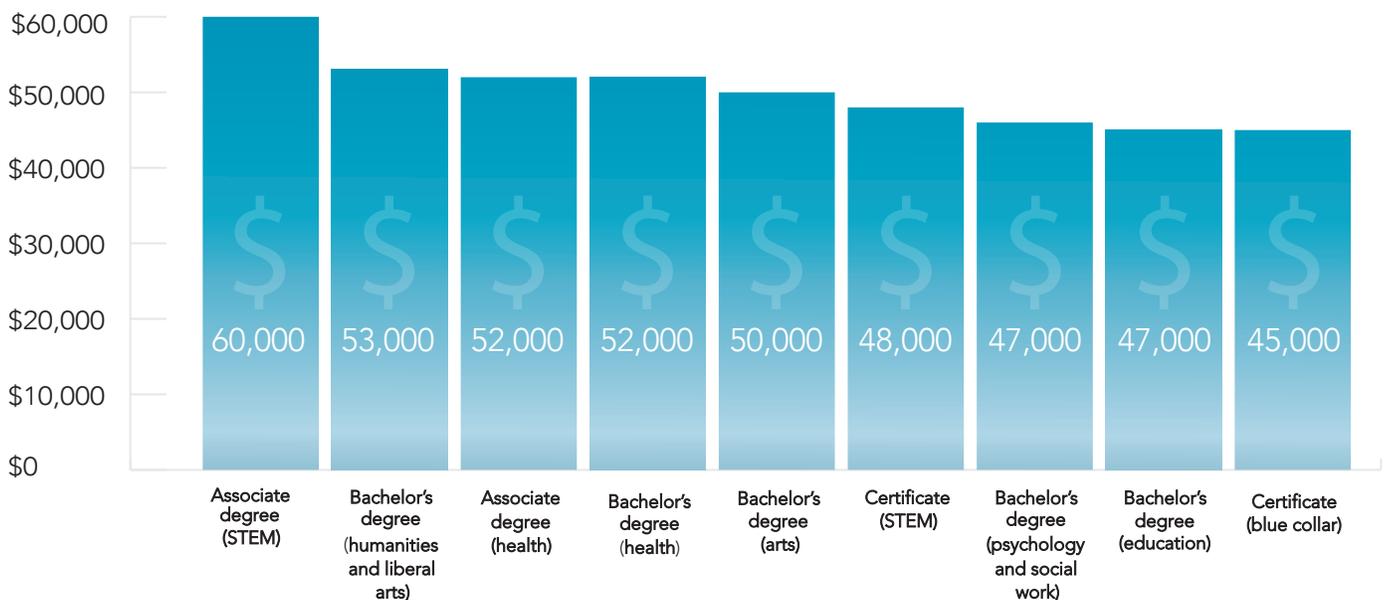


Variance in median earnings

Earnings increase with education levels, but they also increase based on the selected discipline.

Selected median earnings by education level and fields of study



Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, “Five Rules of the College and Career Game,” May 2018.

Data note: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (2009-2016 pooled one-year person-level microdata files) and Survey of Income and Program Participation (2004/2008 combined panels).



Postsecondary education provides a pathway to decent living salaries. Annual median earnings for individuals with less than a high school diploma is \$27,000, compared to \$47,000 for individuals with an associate degree. While median earnings increase with higher levels of education, studies show there is significant variance based on the discipline of the credential. As a result, median earnings for some associate degree and certificate programs are higher than some baccalaureate fields. As shown in the figure above, median earnings for individuals with associate degrees in STEM are \$60,000 and \$48,000 for individuals with a certificate in STEM, compared to \$53,000 for bachelor’s-degree earners in humanities and \$46,000 for a bachelor’s degree in education. Community colleges provide a pathway for certificates and associate degrees to prepare for work or to transfer to four-year degrees. Community colleges also provide credentials for adults who desire to retrain or boost their skills for labor market needs.

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