



THE VALUE OF EDUCATION

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By Tara Carr, Small Business Development Director at UW-Green Bay

The value of education continues to be under scrutiny. The constant evaluation of the return on investment for continual education or formal degree seeking programs is prudent and necessary. As a professional adult, it is a difficult decision on whether or not to complete the unfinished degree or continue on to a graduate degree. The choice to return to college is a time and financial burden on both the individual and the family. The impact of returning to college as an adult diminishes personal free-time and any social life. Conversely, the benefits to completing a degree are tenfold.

As decisions are made, or not made by the paralysis of status quo, it is important to understand the facts. Statistically, those that have attained a degree have increased income, decreased unemployment rates, live a healthier lifestyle, volunteer more and have higher job satisfaction. The unemployment rate for individuals with at least a bachelor's degree has consistently been about half the unemployment rate for high school graduates. The 2016 Bureau of Labor Statistics reported the national unemployment rates based on education attainment: No high school diploma 7.9%, High School diploma 4.9%, Some college 3.9%, Bachelor degree or higher 2.3%.

Socioeconomics is another important factor that is directly impacted by education. The poverty rates based on education for all households: 28% for those with less than high school diploma, 14% high school diploma, 11% some college, 8% associates degree, 5% bachelor degree. These percentages also have a direct correlation with public assistance recipients. According to the trends in education, the College Board Education Pays report states: Median earnings of bachelor's degree recipients, with no advanced degree, working full time in 2011 were \$56,500, \$21,100 more than median earnings of high school graduates.

Gender equality is always a topic up for debate. According to the AAUW, the pay gap for women is 80% in the United States and 78% in Wisconsin. The rates drastically decline for Hispanic (54%) and Black women (63%). Although there are a multitude of solutions to resolve the inequity, the one way to increase earnings for women is through education. Education does not solve the pay gap, but it does offer a means to live more comfortably, have higher income, better job opportunities and higher job satisfaction.

There are many factors to consider when making decisions on degree completion or seeking an additional degree:

- ◆ The total cost of the education (fees, parking fees, transportation, books).
- ◆ The age of the student. The older the student, the less time there is to get return on the investment. The ROI for a 60-year-old is vastly different than for a 45-year-old student.
- ◆ Convenience/delivery method: Online, accelerated format (one class at a time for 6-8 week), traditional semester scheduling (4 classes for 16 weeks), blended learning (in person classes and online), weekend or night course offerings. How long will it take to complete the degree and at what costs?
- ◆ Quality of the institution. Academic rigor. The question to seek: It is not what the college boasts about themselves, but rather, what is the rest of world saying about a degree from that institution? Do employers respect the quality of the degree of the graduates of that institution? Will a graduate program respect an undergraduate degree from that specific institution?



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Factors to consider continued:

- ◆ Accreditation: national versus regional accreditation. The credits/degrees from nationally accredited institutions typically will not transfer to regionally accredited institutions. An example of a nationally accredited institution is ITT Tech. With the recent closing of the for-profit vocational giant ITT Tech, the rest of the world is beginning to see the value in accreditation and compliance in educational standards. Degrees from regionally accredited institutions offer academic rigor and reputation, but are highly sought after from employers. The question of “are they accredited” needs to be replaced with “what type of accreditation”.
- ◆ Private or public institution: A few differences between private and public institutions is size, number of degrees, religious affiliation, price, extracurricular activities, culture. The culture of an institution can include how adult students are embraced and valued.
- ◆ For-profit versus Non-profit: There are glaring differences between non-profit and for-profit institutions: tuition costs, graduation rates, educational rigor and quality, amount spent on instructional costs per student, and amount spent on educational research.

The educational institution that works for one family or individual may not be the best choice for another. It is vital to gather as much information as possible, evaluate what options are best, create a pro and con list, and take action. Remaining stuck and staying in status quo will limit career options and stagnate financial growth. Evaluate your current employment advancement opportunities, job satisfaction, salary and future growth. Then ask yourself “do I want to be in the same situation in five years”? If the answer is “NO”, then is it time to take action, invest in yourself and invest in your future.

Currently, the unemployment rate in Brown County is 3.1% and expected to decrease over the next few months to 2.5%. Employers are struggling to fill positions that require training, such as a certificate or technical degree. Continual education may not equate to attaining a degree. Enroll in a workshop. Take a professional training seminar. Learn a new skill. Every decision and sacrifice made is an opportunity cost. The opportunity of an enhanced career, increased income and happier life is worth the cost of sacrificing time, money and effort today. Making a sacrifice now for the betterment of the future is the right choice. What are you waiting for?

The Wisconsin Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at the University of Wisconsin Green Bay is part of a statewide network of SBDCs working with business owners and entrepreneurs to facilitate business growth and improvement, and to launch successful new companies. The Small Business Development Center offers a variety of services: no-cost business consulting, customized business solutions, financial management, growth & strategic planning, and professional development training.