



ASQ Higher Education Brief

Education
DIVISION



Editor's Note: Shop Class Isn't Dead

By Megan Schmidt, editor

A job that pays between \$50,000 and \$90,000 sounds pretty lucrative to most of us. That's the typical earnings range for most plumbers, welders and mechanics per year. Most of us don't appreciate the skills of these trades until their services are needed—when a transmission fails to shift or when a furnace conks on a frigid night.

We live in a society that places a high value on white collar professions and four-year academic degrees. Blue collar work and vocational training is considered lower status. Educators and parents (who may have worked blue collar jobs themselves) condition young people to believe that success equals a four-year college degree and an office. But college is getting more expensive and its return is becoming more uncertain. It's time to drop the vocational school stigma.

Although these jobs aren't thought of as glitzy and glamorous, many well-paying science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) jobs don't require a bachelor's degree. Employers literally can't pay people to fill the open positions. There are not enough workers with the right skills and qualifications to hire.

In this month's *Higher Education Brief*, we will explore the other side of higher education—nontraditional post-secondary education such as vocational schools and technical programs. We'll hear how organizations like BMW are giving high school graduates part-time work and all-expenses-paid associate's degrees, with the near guarantee of a job and continuing education in the future.

As more organizations get involved with educating the next generation of STEM workers and dissatisfaction with the higher education system increases, vocational school could become the most viable way to earn a high-paying job.

Some of these STEM jobs couldn't be farther from the blue collar STEM jobs of yesteryear—the backbreaking jobs that workers left for the day with dirty fingernails and soiled uniforms. These jobs increasingly require workers to be tech savvy and highly skilled. In some cases, even [four-year universities aren't preparing students](#) well enough for the workforce. Radio frequency engineer David Archer, founder of LearningMeasure.com, an online technical skills training program, created LearningMeasure.com after he encountered many STEM graduates who lacked basic, foundational knowledge in their respective fields. [This month, Archer shares his views on U.S. STEM education](#) and why it is crucial everyone contributes in filling the STEM gap.

All students should be encouraged to continue their education after leaving high school. But we must rethink what we consider higher learning. Are we giving students every opportunity to prepare for a 21st century workforce by disparaging or minimizing the value of vocational education?