

Colin Carter

Ball State University

Son of Kenny Hayes: Glaziers Local 1165



Any personal information included within the essay was redacted, along with any trade identifiers prior to distribution to the scholarship committee. Therefore, the committee made their selection based solely on the content of the essay.

In the construction industry, hands-on skills are essential. Still, in today's evolving workforce, it has become increasingly apparent that knowledge is a powerful asset. Earning an associate's degree with apprenticeship programs is more than just extra work; it is a way to build a more stable and flexible future. Many building trades apprenticeships offer an associate's degree from Ivy Tech with only five additional classes. As someone who earned my associate's degree in high school, I can attest that it's worth the effort. While obtaining journeyman status as quickly as possible may seem appealing initially, pursuing an associate's degree during an apprenticeship offers long-term benefits for career growth, adaptability, and personal development.

Building trades apprenticeships typically last four years and lead to journeyman status, equipping participants with essential skills in their chosen trade. Additionally, participants can earn an associate degree through Ivy Tech by completing five extra college classes, which adds approximately one year of coursework. While I was in high school, I earned my associate's degree through Ivy Tech. I achieved this through a combination of dual-credit classes offered by the high school and classes directly taught by Ivy Tech. There was significant value in this, as it required a great deal of discipline to juggle the tasks of a high school student alongside those of a college student. It also allowed me to earn a bachelor's degree in two years, rather than the standard four.

Even in the construction industry, a degree can offer significant career advantages including a broader skill set, job flexibility/promotion opportunities, and preparation for a changing industry. Coursework in some core classes can enhance communication and problem-solving skills on job sites. While working towards my degree, I had to take a course in

communications and speech. After taking that class, I became more efficient at communicating with people and conveying my points. A class like that can help better communication with clients and coworkers in the construction industry.

Furthermore, having a degree can also increase job flexibility and promotion opportunities. Supervisory roles often require or favor those with more formal education. If a person with foreman status were seeking a project manager position, they would have a better chance of getting it if they had a degree, which is why it would be beneficial to pursue an associate's degree during the apprenticeship program.

As the construction industry increasingly adopts advanced technology, obtaining a degree can help bridge the skills gap in the workforce. Proficiency in specialized software taught in business technology courses enhances onsite efficiency. This knowledge prepares workers to navigate the complexities of a rapidly changing industry, enabling them to meet modern construction demands effectively.

Earning a degree while participating in an apprenticeship program can also provide long-term security and future-proof your job prospects later in life. Often, things can go astray, and economic downturns are a common occurrence. Earning a degree can offer some resilience, as workers with degrees typically have more diverse job options during layoffs or slow seasons. It can also open up pathways to further education. The associate's degree serves as a gateway to earning a bachelor's degree. Even if you don't plan on it now, having that option keeps the door open even if plans change. For me, earning an associate's degree in high school allowed me to pursue multiple professions while still completing my degree in four years. It gave me a two-year buffer in case plans do change and I decide I want to study something else.

Along with obtaining a degree, there will be concerns about time commitment. Some may focus solely on achieving journeyman status to receive higher pay and benefits more quickly. This is a valid goal; however, there are a few essential factors to consider. Taking five classes spread out over several semesters is unlikely to delay the apprenticeship process significantly. In my experience, balancing college-level coursework, high school classes, and extracurricular activities proved to be more manageable than it initially appeared. Although it may feel like a hassle at times, putting in the extra effort ultimately pays off in the long run, and I can personally attest to that.

When it comes to building trades, all career pathways are valuable. Today, they remain a valuable part of the construction ecosystem, and for good reasons. Whether someone chooses to focus solely on the apprenticeship or pursue the degree option, they're both building careers that matter to them and others. Overall, education is a tool, rather than a measure of worth. The trades are built on skill, dedication, and hard work. Having a degree simply adds one more tool to the toolbox.

Ultimately, pursuing an associate's degree alongside an apprenticeship is a strategic investment in your career. This not only provides hands-on training but also deepens your understanding of the trade. Key benefits include accelerated career advancement and increased job flexibility, making you a more competitive candidate in a changing job market. Education enhances job security by equipping you with essential skills to adapt to new challenges. Just as solid foundations support great structures, the knowledge gained through education strengthens your career in the trades, positioning you for both immediate and long-term success.