

## **2025 Edwin Marsh Memorial Scholarship**

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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.

Many building trades apprenticeships now offer the opportunity to earn an associate's degree through Ivy Tech Community College upon completion. This degree requires just five additional classes beyond the traditional apprenticeship curriculum. As a student pursuing a construction career, I find tremendous value in this opportunity and would personally choose to take the additional courses to earn the degree.

Construction is a field that values hands-on experience, but as the industry evolves, so do the expectations of those working in it. The ability to combine practical training with formal education allows apprentices to be more competitive in the workforce. Earning an associate's degree shows dedication and initiative. Qualities that employers often look for when considering candidates for promotions, leadership roles, or project management positions.

I believe it's important to have options. For those who are confident in their career path and don't anticipate needing a degree, a shorter apprenticeship that leads directly to journeyman status is still a great path. But for those like me, who may want to explore more opportunities down the line, such as moving into supervision, estimating, or even teaching, the associate's degree provides a strong foundation to build upon.

What makes this opportunity especially appealing is that it only requires five additional classes. That's a small investment of time when you consider the long-term value it can bring. Many people outside the trades industry have to spend years in college

to earn a degree, often without the guarantee of immediate job placement or stable income. In contrast, trade apprenticeships offer the chance to earn while learning, and now, to also graduate with a degree at the same time.

Some might argue that entering the trades is appealing precisely because it avoids traditional academic routes, and that pursuing a degree might be unnecessary or even a distraction. I understand that viewpoint. Many people are drawn to the trades because they prefer hands-on work, over classroom learning. But in this case, the option to earn a degree doesn't take away from the apprenticeship experience; it enhances it. The extra coursework is manageable, and it can even be completed during evenings, on Saturdays, or online, depending on scheduling. It's an efficient way to add more tools to your belt, not just physical tools, but educational ones.

Additionally, having a degree can offer greater job security and flexibility in the future. The construction industry can be physically demanding, and not everyone stays in the field doing the same work forever. Having a degree can help workers transition into less physically intensive roles if needed later in their careers. It also provides a level of credibility and respect, especially when dealing with clients, engineers, or other professionals on large projects.

I also believe that education has value in itself. It expands your thinking, improves communication skills, and helps you approach problems with new perspectives. These are qualities that benefit any tradesperson, no matter what area they specialize in.

In conclusion, while both paths; earning journeyperson status quickly or adding an associate's degree are valid and respectable, I would personally choose the longer route that comes with obtaining an associates degree. It's an investment in my future that provides more opportunities, greater security, and a sense of achievement. The fact that this option is available through just five additional classes, at no cost to me, makes it even more worthwhile. I believe many students will recognize the value in this and take full advantage of it as they build their careers in the trades.