

THE VALUE OF EARNING AN ASSOCIATE'S DEGREE



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The Value of Earning an Associate's Degree Alongside an Apprenticeship

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As someone who is deeply invested in long-term career growth and the importance of advanced education, I believe that obtaining an associate's degree from Ivy Tech Community College alongside completing a trades apprenticeship is a wise and forward-thinking decision. While a shorter apprenticeship may be appealing in the short-term, the benefits of an associate's degree include greater job flexibility and career advancement, job stability, and increased personal value.

Holding an associate's degree in addition to being a journeyman shows a commitment to both mastering a skilled trade and having broader knowledge in areas like communication, critical thinking, project management, and even business. In today's industry, the most successful professionals often bring more than physical skill to the table. In 2023, construction managers earned a median annual wage of \$101,480, compared to \$55,000 for many journeyman-level roles (U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023). While an apprenticeship alone shows a determined worker, combining trade credentials with an associate's degree puts you on a faster track to higher-paying leadership roles.

An associate's degree can also provide stability and security in a job market that can be unpredictable. Like many other industries, construction can experience fluctuations due to the economy, project funding, and demand. Although in the next 10 years construction employment is projected to grow over 4%, desirable positions can be competitive (U.S Bureau of Labor Statistic, 2025). Many job postings for foreman and site supervisor positions specify that degrees are preferred or required. According to a survey by the National Center for Construction

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Education and Research (2024), 58% of contractors reported that employees with additional education beyond the apprenticeship were promoted into supervisory roles more quickly.

Beyond the economic and professional advantages, many people also find personal value in earning a degree. Many apprentices come from families where higher education may have not been easily accessible or encouraged. Completing an associate's degree is a great accomplishment and can build confidence and inspire others. In 2022, a survey by Strada Education Network found that nearly 70% of adults who earned an associate's degree felt their lives improved significantly in terms of personal fulfillment and stability. It also sets a positive example for younger generations who want a career in the trades but believe that college and trades are mutually exclusive.

Critics of the associate's degree option may argue that the extra coursework delays full-time employment which postpones higher wages. While this is true, it is short-sighted. The additional five classes required for the degree are a small investment compared to the long-term value. On average, workers with an associate's degree earn 18% more each week than workers with a high school diploma or equivalent (National Center for Education Statistic, 2024). For trade workers, this can be even higher since degree holders are more likely to be considered for supervisory positions.

Construction sites today are about leading. Soft skills like communication and leadership are now critical to the success of projects. These skills are often taught in a classroom environment through coursework that focuses on communication, planning, and organizational leadership. Earning an associate's degree gives tools that many journeymen won't have until they are much further along in their careers. Trades are evolving, and so are the roles in them. From

THE VALUE OF EARNING AN ASSOCIATE'S DEGREE

union leadership positions to training instructors, the potential for advancement in trades is substantial. But these doors often open faster for those who combine real-world experience with formal education.

Overall, while a shorter apprenticeship path can help reach journeyman status faster, I believe the long-term value of that path with an associate's degree outweighs the initial inconvenience. The degree offers increased knowledge and job security, while also enhancing credibility, earning potential, and personal accomplishment. For those who truly want to maximize their career potential in the trades, the associate's degree is a strategic advantage.

THE VALUE OF EARNING AN ASSOCIATE'S DEGREE

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