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Anticipating Workforce Pell

An Exploration of Short-Term Certificate Programs and Their Outcomes in Washington State

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In the One Big Beautiful Bill Act passed in July of 2025, Congress extended Pell Grant eligibility to very-short-term certificate programs for the first time. While the federal grants have traditionally been rationed to programs that are at least 15 weeks long, the so-called "Workforce Pell" program will make subsidies of up to $3,982 (based on the Pell award for the 2026–27 award year) available to students pursuing certificates 8 to 14 weeks and 150 to 599 clock hours.[1]

The policy was debated for years before enactment: Supporters argued such grants provide an on-ramp to valuable training opportunities for lower-income and adult students who might not otherwise be able to sacrifice time away from the labor market or family responsibilities to pursue a longer credential. Others worried that the earnings outcomes of such programs tend to be low, and subsidizing them might divert students away from enrollment in more valuable credential programs. The final legislation seeks to respond to those concerns by including a lengthy set of requirements and guardrails, discussed in more detail below, though their effectiveness in ensuring Workforce Pell grants go to high-quality programs remains to be seen.

It will take time to fully evaluate whether this new source of funds ultimately proves to be a chute or ladder promoting upward mobility for lower-income Americans. However, this report takes a preliminary step, by painting a picture of the landscape of sub-baccalaureate credentials offered by public institutions in the state of Washington in the years prior to the creation of Workforce Pell.[2] We describe the credential programs that are likely to be eligible for Workforce Pell; the characteristics of students enrolled in short-term certificate programs relative to other sub-baccalaureate credentials, with an eye on the extent of stratification of students by demographic and academic characteristics across credential programs of differing lengths; and the earnings outcomes of students earning credentials in these programs. Throughout the report we compare the short-term certificates to other sub-baccalaureate programs, including longer certificates and associate degrees.

BACKGROUND ON WORKFORCE PELL

An early iteration of legislation extending Pell Grant eligibility to very-short-term programs, named the JOBS Act, was introduced in 2017, kicking off a nearly decade-long push by community colleges, advocates, and employers for the policy change. Many believed that the shift would allow non-traditional students to access higher education in high-need, in-demand fields. Others raised concerns that poor outcomes could exacerbate existing college attainment and earnings gaps for low-income students and students of color.

The One Big Beautiful Bill Act adopted eligibility requirements and guardrails that sought to address concerns from the field. (See Box 1 for a summary.) In order to qualify, programs need to be 8 to 14 weeks in length, as well as 150 to 599 clock hours. Programs in any sector are eligible; so are online programs,[3] as long as their state has entered into an agreement with any

other state in which the school wishes to enroll students confirming both states wish to offer programs for that occupation. Programs that are not offered for credit can qualify, but only if they lead to a credential from the institution, and the program meets all other Workforce Pell requirements, including that the program's coursework is transferable to at least one other related for-credit program.[4]

States bear a significant responsibility to review and approve (or disapprove) certain fields and particular programs of study for eligibility. In particular, states will define a set of high-skill, high-wage, and/or in-demand fields—drawing on definitions used for other federal workforce training programs[5]—that qualify for Workforce Pell; ensure programs meet employers' hiring requirements and are portable across employers; and confirm that credits for the programs are transferable toward at least one other related certificate or degree program at that or another institution. States must also use their state data systems[6] to measure and verify programs meet at least a 70 percent graduation rate standard, and a 70 percent job placement rate standard. Each of these requirements must be assessed before the program gains Pell Grant eligibility, based on at least one year of program operations.

Colleges must also seek approval from the U.S Department of Education ("Department") to begin the flow of Workforce Pell dollars. At the initial application, the Department will mostly be confirming the state process was appropriately followed. After a program has been running for at least three years, the Department will also ensure that programs meet a price-to-discretionary-earnings test: The published tuition and fees of a program must not be more than the program's discretionary earnings, defined as the median earnings of program graduates (measured one year after graduation) minus 150 percent of the federal poverty level ($23,940 in 2026).

Box 1: Key Requirements for Workforce Pell Programs

The One Big Beautiful Bill Act requires Workforce Pell programs to satisfy several criteria. Some of those criteria are explicitly set out in federal law and will be evaluated by the U.S. Department of Education, like the price-to-discretionary-earnings measure; most others are only outlined at a high level in the law and will be left to the discretion of state policymakers (such as defining which programs are high-skill, high-wage, or in-demand) or are subject to implementation by states (such as the 70 percent standards for completion rates and job placement rates).

* Primarily state responsibility. † Primarily federal responsibility.

Basic Eligibility

- Program length of 8–14 weeks and 150–599 clock hours†
- Online programs are eligible, except correspondence courses†
- Programs cannot outsource more than 25 percent of a program to another entity that is not eligible to receive federal financial aid, or up to 50 percent if the program is offered as related technical instruction for an apprenticeship program. Coursework is considered to be "outsourced" if the ineligible provider designs, administers, or offers instruction for it†
- Noncredit programs are eligible only if they meet all other Workforce Pell program requirements, including that the program is transferable to at least one other program within that or another institution

Programmatic Characteristics

- Offered in a high-skill, high-wage, or in-demand field*
- Meets the hiring requirements of employers*
- Credential is stackable and portable across employers*
- Certificate or degree is transferable for credit toward a related certificate or degree*

Student Outcomes

- Meets a minimum 70% completion rate*
- Meets a minimum 70% job placement rate*
- Meets a price-to-discretionary-earnings standard, where the price exceeds discretionary earnings (defined as the median earnings of program graduates, measured one year after graduation, minus 150 percent of the federal poverty level)†

DATA USED IN THIS REPORT

A key challenge many states face in preparing for Workforce Pell implementation is that, even in states with more advanced student longitudinal data systems, key data needed to determine whether programs will be initially eligible and can maintain eligibility are either not fully available or not centrally collected and readily available for state policymakers. For instance, many states do not collect data on the number of weeks and clock or credit hours for non-federal aid-eligible programs, making it difficult to determine which programs run between 8 and 15 weeks and 150 and 600 clock hours. States also often lack information about the published tuition and fees of postsecondary programs, or their outcomes—especially for non-public college programs. The vast majority of states also do not collect information on the occupations of workers through their unemployment insurance data systems, a data point that will be needed to calculate occupation-specific job placement rates beginning in AY 2029–30. (Washington state is one of the few states already collecting those data.)

This brief draws on data from Washington state's P20W longitudinal data system. The P20W system links individual-level administrative records across early learning, K–12, postsecondary, and workforce sectors, enabling policymakers and researchers to track individuals across key educational and labor market transitions. Our sample includes individuals who earned a credential from a public postsecondary institution in Washington state between 2015 and 2023. Credentials included in the analysis range from undergraduate certificates to bachelor's degrees, with a particular focus on the shortest-length certificates.[7] For each credential earner, we observe the type of credential awarded, the date of the award, the field of study (based on the CIP code of students' primary majors), and the awarding institution. We are also able to further disaggregate certificates based on the credit hours required for the credential: very-short-term certificates (1–19 credits), short-term certificates (20–44 credits), medium-term certificates (45–89 credits), and long-term certificates (90+ credits). Individuals are counted in multiple credential categories or completer cohorts if they earned multiple credentials in different academic years; but if an individual earns multiple credentials within the same year, they are only assigned to the highest credential category.

We link credential-earners to earnings records from the state's Unemployment Insurance system, where we observe individuals' quarterly earnings and hours worked. The primary outcomes are median annual earnings, median hourly wages, and employment rates. Annual earnings are measured relative to the quarter of credential completion, and are constructed by summing over four consecutive quarters. Employment is defined as having any positive earnings or any positive hours worked reported in a given quarter. The hourly wage is constructed by dividing earnings over the four consecutive quarters by the number of hours worked in those four quarters.

Throughout this report, we explore the outcomes of different types of sub-baccalaureate credentials, particularly focusing on undergraduate certificate programs that are between 1 and 19 credit hours in length. These very-short-term (1–19 credit hour) programs include programs that are already eligible for Pell Grants (those at least 15 credit hours in length, if they are also at least 15 weeks), programs that will become eligible for Workforce Pell (those between 4 and 15 credit hours, if they are also at least 8 and fewer than 15 weeks), and programs that will remain ineligible for either Pell or Workforce Pell (those fewer than 4 credits, fewer than 8 weeks, or both). We are not able to precisely estimate Workforce Pell eligibility based on existing Washington P20W data, because it requires measures of both the specific number of credit hours and the number of weeks of the program that are not readily collected. This reflects one common challenge for states hoping to understand the implications of Workforce Pell among their colleges. However, because the 1–19 credit hour programs are inclusive of Workforce Pell eligibility, and we expect there are considerable similarities with other very-short-term certificate programs, we focus on describing the outcomes of these programs in this report.

TRENDS IN SUB-BACCALAUREATE PROGRAM OFFERINGS AND AWARDS

In Washington state, the number of certificates awarded by—and the number of certificate programs operating in—public two-year colleges peaked in 2016, and has fallen since, while the number of associate degrees awarded has fallen only slightly (see Table 1). In 2016, more than 15,000 certificates were awarded by public two-year institutions in the state, offered across nearly 1,000 certificate programs.[8] More than half of the certificates awarded that year (53 percent) were very short-term certificates (1–19 credits). Those very-short-term certificates made up about one in three (34 percent) undergraduate certificate programs offered by community colleges.

In 2023, the most recent year for which complete data are available, the number of certificates awarded by public two-year institutions was lower by half, to around 6,700 certificates. The number of programs had also fallen, from 942 in 2016 to 667 in 2023. In 2023, though, a little fewer than half—48 percent—of certificates awarded were still to those very-short-term, 1-to-19 credit hour certificates.

Table 1: Program and Award Counts, by Credential Type and Year, for Public Two-Year Institutions

	Public Two-Year									
	Very-Short-Term Certificates (1–19 Credits)*		Short-Term Certificates (20–44 Credits)		Long-Term Certificates (45–89 Credits or 900–1,799 Hours)		Very-Long-Term Certificates (90+ Credits or 1,800+ Hours)		Associate Degrees	
	No. of Programs	No. of Awards	No. of Programs	No. of Awards	No. of Programs	No. of Awards	No. of Programs	No. of Awards	No. of Programs	No. of Awards
2015	270	6,192	343	5,650	359	2,892	22	147	884	28,966
2016	314	7,993	287	4,030	316	2,890	25	171	884	29,294
2017	311	7,181	294	3,230	327	2,585	17	79	884	29,296
2018	313	7,132	306	3,571	316	2,204	24	169	884	30,062
2019	304	6,343	305	3,552	289	2,107	19	143	889	30,075
2020	251	4,830	276	3,166	278	1,873	10	88	904	28,160
2021	209	3,590	248	2,541	261	1,767	6	38	870	28,965
2022	218	3,172	211	2,101	246	1,673	4	20	854	25,416
2023	224	3,231	199	1,951	237	1,497	7	88	820	23,068
Total	**2,414**	**49,664**	**2,469**	**29,792**	**2,629**	**19,488**	**134**	**943**	**7,873**	**253,302**

Notes: Very-short-term certificate programs do not perfectly align with prospective Workforce Pell programs—which must be 150–599 clock hours or 4–15 credit hours, as well as 8–14 weeks—but it is the closest available approximation of Workforce Pell eligibility based on credit hours. Programs are defined as the unique combination of the institution, credential level, and six-digit Classification of Institutional Programs code identifying the field of study. The number of certificates awarded differ slightly from those published by the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) due to our cohort definition.

As of 2023, teacher education certificates in levels and methods[9] are the most commonly awarded very-short-term certificate, and also appear as one of the most commonly awarded certificates for short-term and long-term certificate programs (see the top panel of Table 2). Other fields that appear in the top 10 most commonly awarded fields of study across all types of undergraduate certificates (very-short-term [1–19 credits], short-term [20–44 credits], and long-term [45–89 credits] certificates) are vehicle maintenance and repair, accounting, precision metal working, and business and management. Health fields like medical assisting and clinical lab sciences are common very-short-term credentials, whereas health administrative services certificates are more common among both short- and long-term certificates.

Over the last decade, the proportion of short-term and other certificate programs awarded shifted across different fields of study. Among very-short-term certificates (those 1–19 credit hours), for instance, the share of credentials awarded for teacher education programs has grown from 4.5 percent in 2015 to 19.9 percent in 2023. The share of medical assisting very-short-term certificates awarded has grown from 2.3 to 11.0 percent over the same timeframe. Meanwhile, the share of very-short-term certificates in precision metal working has fallen from 7.2 to 3.1 percent of such certificates.

Table 2: Share of Awards in the Top 10 Fields of Study in 2023 by Credential Type and Change Since 2015

Very-Short-Term Certificates (1–19 Credits)	2015	2023
Top 10 Fields of Study in 2023		
Teacher Ed: Levels & Methods (1312)	4.5	19.9
Practical Nursing (5139)	16.8	18.4
Medical Assisting (5108)	2.3	11.0
Clinical Lab Science (5110)	6.8	8.9
Vehicle Maintenance & Repair (4706)	10.4	8.4
Ground Transportation (4902)	2.9	3.6
Accounting & Related (5203)	4.7	3.5
Precision Metal Working (4805)	7.2	3.1
IT Admin & Mgmt (1110)	1.7	2.9
Business Admin & Mgmt (5202)	2.2	1.8
Total Share in Top 10 Fields Shown	**59.4**	**81.4**

Short-Term Certificates (20–44 Credits)	2015	2023
Top 10 Fields of Study in 2023		
Teacher Ed: Levels & Methods (1312)	11.5	31.7
Industrial Production Tech (1506)	6.2	9.0
Building Finishing & Mgmt (4604)	1.7	8.4
Vehicle Maintenance & Repair (4706)	6.9	5.8
Precision Metal Working (4805)	8.9	5.1
Accounting & Related (5203)	4.3	4.8
Health Admin Services (5107)	4.5	4.3
Business Admin & Mgmt (5202)	1.8	4.3
Culinary Arts & Svcs (1205)	0.9	3.2
Dental Support Services (5106)	0.2	2.9
Total Share in Top 10 Fields Shown	**46.8**	**79.5**

Long-Term Certificates (45–89 Credits or 900–1,799 Hours)	2015	2023
Top 10 Fields of Study in 2023		
Medical Assisting (5108)	15.0	12.5
Teacher Ed: Levels & Methods (1312)	2.2	10.6
Practical Nursing (5139)	13.7	10.2
Health Admin Services (5107)	7.4	7.3
IT Admin & Mgmt (1110)	4.1	6.9
Vehicle Maintenance & Repair (4706)	4.6	6.9
Precision Metal Working (4805)	4.6	6.2
Industrial Production Tech (1506)	2.6	5.7
Accounting & Related (5203)	3.7	4.9
Business Admin & Mgmt (5202)	2.6	3.8
Total Share in Top 10 Fields Shown	**60.7**	**74.9**

Associate Degrees	2015	2023
Top 10 Fields of Study in 2023		
Liberal Arts & Humanities (2401)	55.9	55.1
Registered Nursing (5138)	5.8	7.0
Business/Commerce (gen.) (5201)	5.5	5.2
Vehicle Maintenance & Repair (4706)	2.0	2.1
Physical Sciences, Gen (4001)	2.4	2.1
Medical Assisting (5108)	2.8	1.9
Business Admin & Mgmt (5202)	1.9	1.8
Teacher Ed: Levels & Methods (1312)	1.2	1.7
Allied Health Diagnostic (5109)	1.4	1.4
Accounting & Related (5203)	1.6	1.3
Total Share in Top 10 Fields Shown	**80.5**	**79.6**

Note: Four-digit CIP code of the program is shown in parentheses. See Appendix Table A1 for data on very-long-term certificates. Table limited to the top 10 fields of study for each credential level by number of awards in 2023. The equivalent 2015 shares are provided for the same fields, but those fields were not necessarily in the top 10 in that year.

Similar trends are observed among other types of certificates. For example, among short-term certificates (20–44 credit hours in length), the number of certificates awarded in teacher education programs in levels and methods has increased from 11.5 to 31.7 percent; building finishing and management certificates have grown from 1.7 to 8.4 percent. Among longer-term (45–89 credit hour) certificates awarded, the share of credentials awarded for teacher education programs in levels and methods has grown from 2.2 to 10.6 percent, while medical assisting credentials have fallen from 15.0 to 12.5 percent.

Among associate degrees, the field of study composition of awards appears steadier over time. Liberal arts associate degrees have held their share at around 55 percent of credentials at that level, while registered nursing credentials have grown from 5.8 to 7.0 percent. Teacher education associate degrees make up just 1.7 percent of degrees awarded at that level in 2023.

DEMOGRAPHICS OF STUDENTS EARNING SHORT-TERM CERTIFICATES

An important question for policymakers considering implementation of the Workforce Pell initiative is the extent to which such programs enroll non-traditional or underrepresented students. A core concern around Workforce Pell has been the potential stratification of low-income students and students of color into lower-earning programs and fields. Researchers have long explored whether policies that promote shorter term credentials "democratize" higher education—expanding access to college for students who might otherwise not have attended—or "divert" some students who might otherwise have pursued higher levels of educational attainment. In this section, we provide descriptive data on the demographics of students pursuing shorter and longer credentials, and leave more rigorous analyses of how Workforce Pell impacts students' long-run economic mobility for future work.

Relative to associate degree-holding students, the data suggest some evidence of stratification across program types. Nontraditionally aged students (aged 26+) enroll in very-short-term certificates at a much higher rate (comprising nearly 61 percent of very-short-term certificate-holders) than associate degree programs (35 percent) (see Table 3). Black and Latino/a students comprise 23.7 percent of very-short-term certificate holders, compared with 17 percent of associate degree graduates. Overall, the gender balance of very-short-term certificate holders is comparable, at 53 percent female, to associate degree-holders (57 percent female).

Across fields of study, however, we see certain fields where women enroll in much higher numbers, and others where men do. For instance, in Appendix Table A2, we analyze the demographics of students enrolled in the five largest fields for very-short-term certificates, and find that the share of women in teacher education (92 percent), clinical lab science (82 percent), and practical nursing (82 percent) is much higher than the share in the other two largest fields of medical assisting (37 percent) and vehicle maintenance and repair (15 percent). The same three fields—teacher education, clinical lab science, and practical nursing—also have a much larger share of Black and Latino/a students (38, 29, and 25 percent, respectively) than medical assisting (12 percent) or vehicle maintenance/repair (18 percent). As shown below, these sorting patterns have implications for earnings outcome differences across different demographic groups. Appendix Tables A3, A4, and A5 show similar analyses of demographic differences across the top five fields for other types of sub-baccalaureate credentials.

Table 3: Demographics of Students Earning Different Credential Types

	Credential Type				
	Very-Short-Term Certificates (1–19 Credits)*	Short-Term Certificates (20–44 Credits)	Long-Term Certificates (45–89 Credits or 900–1,799 Hours)	Associate Degrees	Bachelor's Degrees
Age (%)					
Under 20	11.4	6.2	4.5	25.7	-
20–23	19.5	17.5	18.3	32.4	64.1
24–25	7.7	8.3	8.8	7.2	11.7
26–29	13.9	14.4	15.8	10.8	9.9
30+	47.5	53.7	52.6	23.9	13.9
Gender (%)					
Female	53.4	51.4	52.8	56.8	54.0
Male	43.0	45.3	43.8	39.6	43.5
Any Other	3.6	3.3	3.4	3.6	2.4
Race/Ethnicity (%)					
American Indian/ Alaska Native	1.3	1.1	1.1	0.8	0.5
Asian	10.2	8.0	11.2	13.0	13.5
Black	6.3	7.3	7.3	3.7	3.1
Latino/a	17.4	17.7	13.1	13.1	10.4
Multi-racial	5.6	5.3	5.4	6.6	8.1
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	0.7	0.9	0.8	0.5	-
White	47.0	48.8	50.7	50.7	49.0
Unknown Race/Eth	10.0	9.2	8.8	10.4	13.9
Other Characteristics					
WA Resident (%)	71.6	72.0	70.8	74.5	68.5

Notes: Characteristics for the combined set of students in 2018–22; we use a larger number of student cohorts to have sufficiently sized cohorts to report on smaller subgroups. Note also that Washington state has extensive dual enrollment opportunities, which may contribute to the high share of graduates under age 20; see, for example, Delbom, L., Fumia, D., and Wengrin, M. (2024). "Postsecondary Credential Outcomes for Students Who Enroll in Dual Credit. Education Research & Data Center." Retrieved from https://erdc.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2024-11/HB1867_Report_2024_September_Final_0.pdf . Data are suppressed (-) in order to protect privacy if the number of students in a category is too small to report.

EARNINGS AND EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES OF STUDENTS EARNING SHORT-TERM CERTIFICATES

A core concern for policymakers is whether higher education credentials provide value in the labor market, equipping graduates with the skills they need to succeed in the workforce. This is especially true in the context of Workforce Pell, where the law requires programs to ensure their earnings meet or exceed a minimum threshold (150 percent of the federal poverty level) and that their published tuition and fees do not exceed the difference between graduates' median earnings and that threshold.

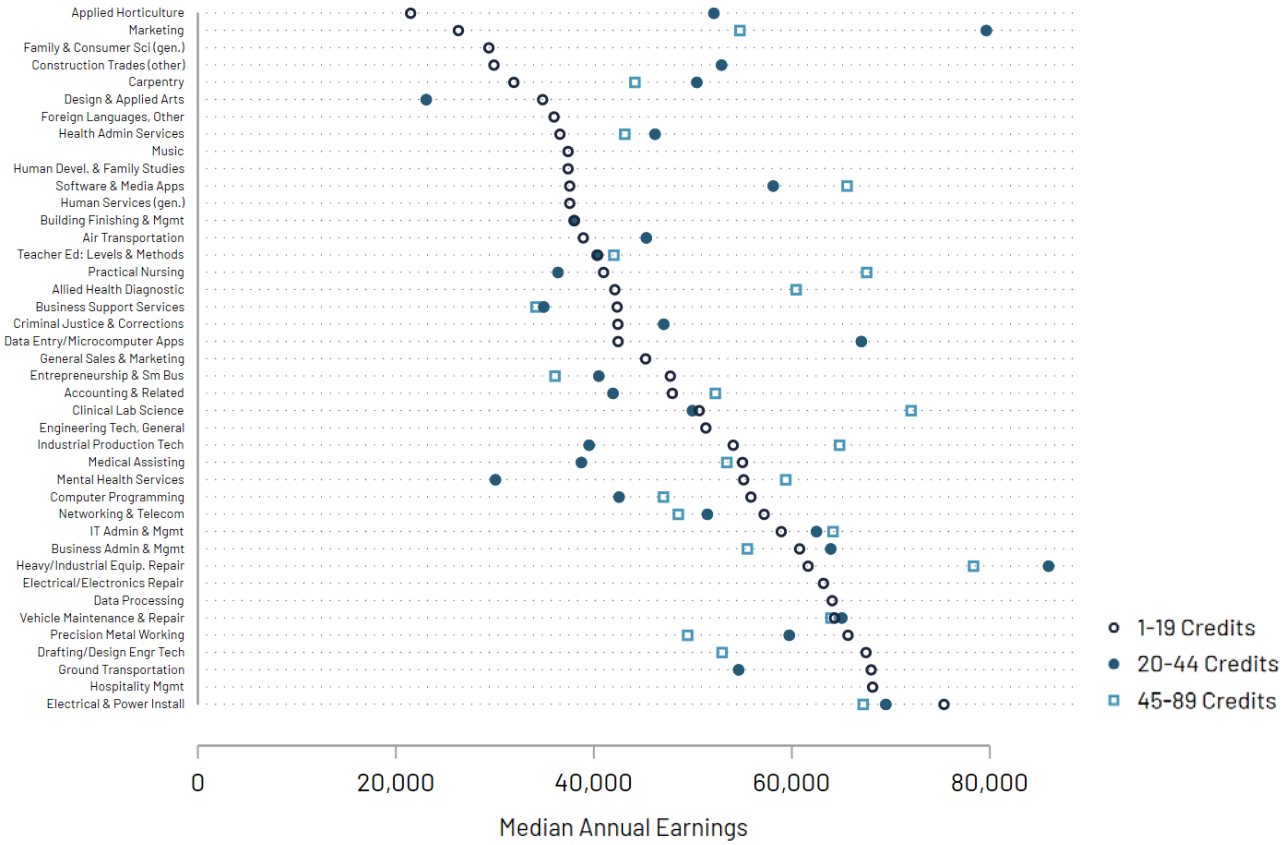
Earnings and Employment Three Years Post-Completion

Typical earnings among graduates vary widely across very-short-term, short-term, and long-term certificates. The three types of undergraduate certificates have significant overlap in their reported typical earnings, though longer credentials tend to have slightly higher earnings when comparing within the same field. Figure 1 shows earnings outcomes for certificates of different lengths for all the fields of study where at least one very short-term certificate is offered. Among these, very-short-term certificates (1–19 credits) have typical earnings measured three years after completion ranging from $21,500 to more than $75,000. Short-term (20–44 credits) and long-term (45–89 credits) certificates have slightly higher earnings than very-short-term credentials. Short-term certificates range from about $23,100 to nearly $130,000 in those fields, while long-term certificates range from $22,200 to about $93,000.

In some fields shown in Figure 1, the earnings of longer-term credentials are notably higher than among very-short-term certificates. For instance, very-short-term and short-term certificates in practical nursing have median earnings of around $41,000 and $36,400, respectively; long-term certificates have median earnings of more than $67,500. Similarly, clinical lab sciences very-short-term and short-term certificates both have earnings of about $50,600; while long-term certificates have median earnings of $72,000.

In other fields, the relationship between post-credential earnings and certificate length is reversed; for instance, very-short-term and long-term certificates in medical assisting both report similar earnings of more than $53,000, while short-term certificates report lower earnings of $39,000. Very-short-term certificates in precision metal working report higher three-year earnings ($65,600) than either short-term ($59,700) or long-term ($49,500) certificates in the same field.

Figure 1: Median Annual Earnings Three Years Post-Completion, by Credential Level and Field of Study, for Fields with At Least One Very-Short-Term Certificate

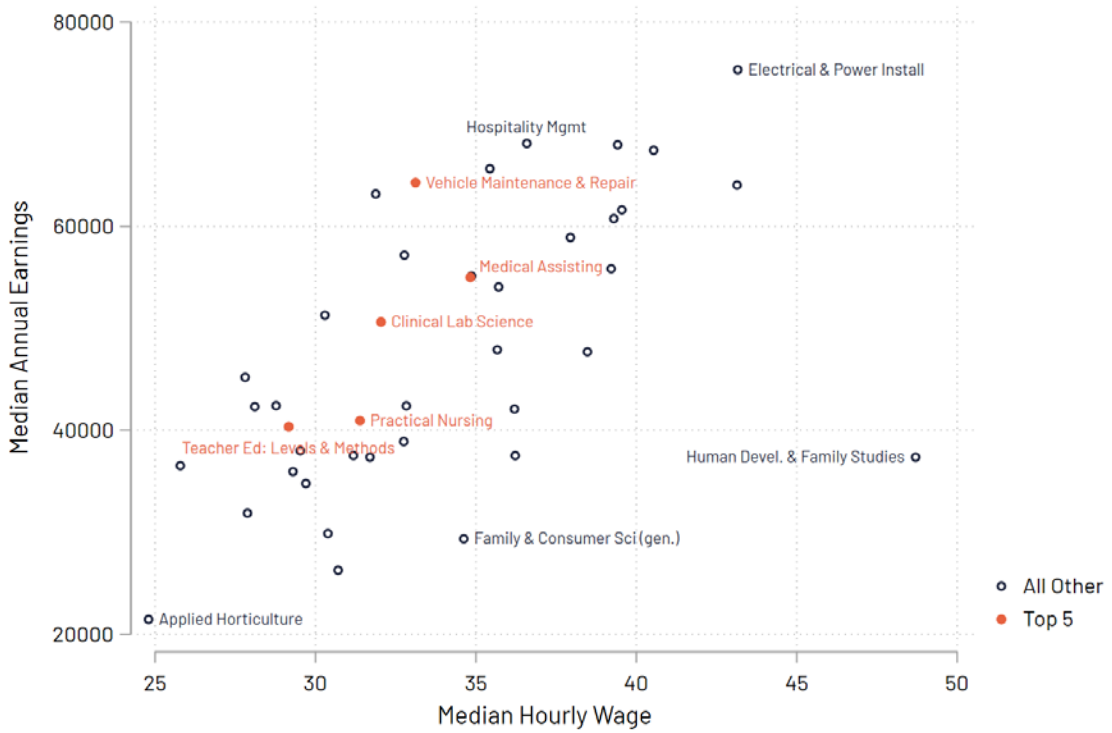


Notes: These data reflect the median annual earnings three years post-completion for the 2020 completer cohort, the most recent available cohort, and include fields of study (CIP4) that have at least one very-short-term (1–19-credits) certificate program. For detailed data on median earnings by field of study, credential type, and measurement timeframes, see Appendix Table A6. For the most recent detailed data on median earnings by field of study and credential type, see Appendix Table A7. Earnings are reported in real 2025 dollars.

Figure 2 provides further context on graduates' labor market outcomes. It displays the relationship between median annual earnings and the median hourly wage[10] three years post-completion. Annual earnings across fields of study may not represent the full picture of graduates' labor market success. Different fields of study could end up with similar levels of annual earnings, but very different hourly wages if graduates in one field are more or less likely to work on a part-time basis. In many states, data on the hours individuals work are not collected, limiting states' ability to understand an important dimension of graduates' labor market outcomes. However, because Washington state collects information on the hours worked of individuals, as well as earnings, policymakers can understand how earnings during a year might be affected by the time it took graduates to find a job, which positions lead to the highest-paying jobs – and which might allow workers to work fewer hours for the same pay.

Importantly, the highest-paying very-short-term certificates in Washington state by three-year median earnings do not always align with the typical hourly wage workers earn. For example, graduates with very-short-term certificates in family and consumer sciences typically earn close to $35 per hour—similar to graduates with a certificate in medical assisting. However, the median three-year earnings for family and consumer sciences graduates are about $29,400, compared with nearly $55,000 for medical assisting. These differences illustrate the importance of understanding both the median annual earnings and median hourly wages across credentials.

Figure 2: Relationship Between Median Hourly Wages and Median Annual Earnings, Three Years Post-Completion, by Field of Study for Very-Short-Term (1–19 Credits) Certificates



Notes: These data show the median annual earnings and median hourly wages three years post-completion for the 2020 completer cohort, and include all very-short-term (1–19 credits) certificate programs. The most commonly awarded very-short-term certificates are indicated by the solid orange dots and corresponding labels. For the most recent detailed data on median hourly wages by field of study and credential type, see Appendix Table A8. Earnings are reported in real 2025 dollars.

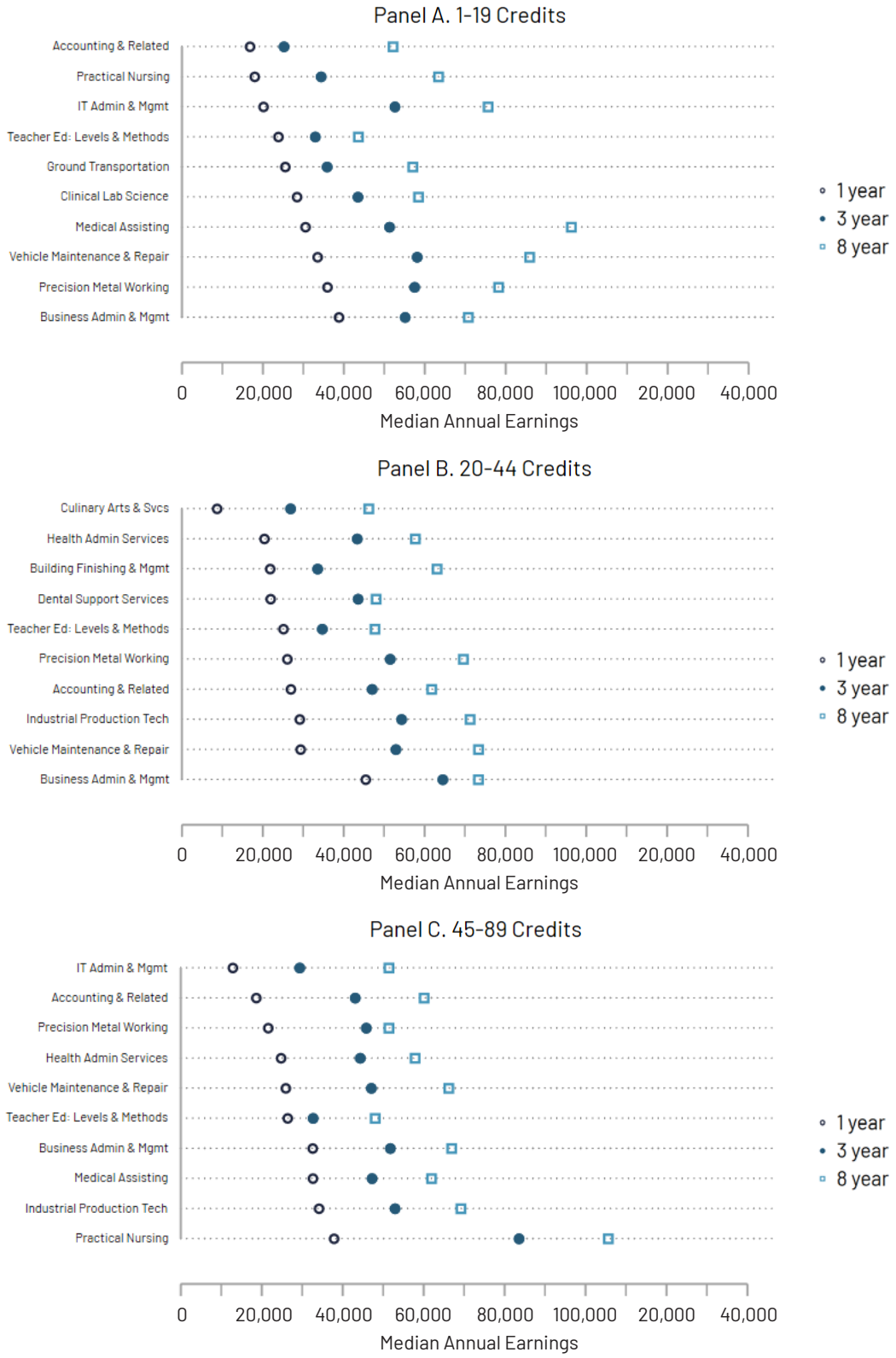
Earnings and Employment Over Time

The U.S. Department of Education's regulations specify that, for the purposes of the tuition-to-discretionary-earnings measure in the law, earnings will be measured one year after completion. However, typical earnings levels are likely to grow to varying extents in the years that follow, due to career progression or the returns to further schooling. To examine this variation across fields of study, we measured the earnings of graduates from an older cohort (students who graduated in 2015) at several points in time post-completion. Figure 3 depicts median earnings in the first, third, and eighth years after graduation, for workers in the top 10 fields by the number of credentials awarded for each program length.

Earnings measured eight years after completion show similar variation across fields of study and credential type as earnings measured earlier, but can differ significantly from earnings measured just one or three years after completion. Very-short-term (1–19 credits) certificates have eight-year median earnings that range from about $34,000 (building finishing and management) to $139,100 (fire protection). Short-term (20–44 credits) certificate programs range from about $23,200 (cosmetology) to nearly $167,000 (fire protection) in median earnings when measured eight years post-graduation; and long term from about $15,900 (hospitality management) to $151,700 (heavy/industrial equipment repair). To an extent, this variation may be explained by students who go on to earn different credentials during the earnings measurement window, who are included in our estimates.

In some fields and certificate types represented in Figure 3, like medical assisting, year-8 earnings are substantially higher than year-1 earnings—more than $96,000, compared with just $30,500, for very-short-term certificates. Among long-term certificates in medical assisting, the range is smaller from $32,600 for one-year earnings to $62,000 for eight-year earnings. In others, like teacher education very-short-term certificates, the earnings growth from the first to the eighth year after graduation is smaller—from about $23,800 to about $43,500, a similar range as across long-term certificates in teacher education (which grow from $26,400 to nearly $48,000).

Figure 3: Median Annual Earnings, One Year, Three Years, and Eight Years Post-Completion, for Top 10 Fields of Study



Notes: These data reflect the median annual earnings one year, three years, and eight years post-completion for the 2015 completer cohort. The top 10 fields of study as of 2023 for each credential type are displayed. For more information on earnings outcomes for other fields of study, see Appendix Table A6. Earnings are reported in real 2025 dollars.

Earnings Outcomes by Race/Ethnicity

Policymakers are also concerned with ensuring that non-degree credentials provide good outcomes to all participants. To that end, we show in Table 4 the earnings outcomes by graduates' race/ethnicity for each type of certificate. Across all three types of certificates (very-short-term, short-term, and long-term), the median earnings for both Black and Latino/a graduates are below the overall median earnings in the field. Other underrepresented minority students, including American Indian/Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and multi-racial graduates also have earnings below the overall typical earnings for each certificate length. For instance, among very-short-term certificates, the typical three-year earnings are around $48,200; among Black and Latino/a graduates (about $45,400 and $44,500, respectively), earnings are lower, and among American Indian/Alaska Native graduates in particular, earnings are much lower (about $39,100). Meanwhile, white and Asian graduates have higher earnings, at around $50,900 and $58,300, respectively.

Differences in median annual earnings by race/ethnicity may be driven, in part, by differences in the fields of study of the certificates earned by students from different backgrounds. For example, among very-short-term certificate earners Black and Latino/a graduates are overrepresented in lower-paying fields of study, like teacher ed: levels and methods, and underrepresented in higher-paying fields of study, like medical assisting and vehicle maintenance and repair (see Table 3 and Appendix Table A2).

Table 4: Median Annual Earnings Three Years Post-Completion, by Credential Level and Race/Ethnicity

	Certificate Type		
	Very-Short-Term Certificates (1–19 Credits)	**Short-Term Credits (20–44 Credits)**	**Long-Term Certificates (45–89 Credits)**
American Indian/Alaska Native	39,141	35,948	46,025
Asian	58,307	56,702	60,537
Black	45,369	42,494	50,505
Latino/a	44,477	43,815	51,601
Multi-racial	46,731	46,894	62,923
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	45,322	38,808	62,458
White	50,858	51,003	52,546
Overall	**48,220**	**47,757**	**52,619**

Notes: These data reflect the median annual earnings three years post-completion for the 2020 completer cohort. Earnings are reported in real 2025 dollars.

ACCOUNTABILITY IMPLICATIONS DISCUSSION

For the purposes of Workforce Pell programs, institutions will be required to demonstrate a minimum level of performance, including a 70 percent job placement rate and capping tuition and fees below the difference of median earnings and 150 percent of the federal poverty level ($23,475 in 2025). Using available data, we proxy for these two performance metrics using the employment rate and median annual earnings one year after graduation, respectively. Figure 4 gives a very rough sense for how very-short-term certificate programs might fare in meeting these criteria.[11]

The x-axis of the figure measures each field's annual employment rate, measured as the share of students who either have positive earnings or report positive hours worked in any of the four quarters after graduation. This varies from the employment rate two quarters after graduation that will be used to assess Workforce Pell programs. The y-axis shows the first year earnings of working graduates, with the horizontal line drawn at 150 percent of the federal poverty level. Programs with

earnings below that standard would automatically fail the price-to-discretionary earnings requirement, while programs above the line must limit their tuition to the amount by which their graduates' earnings exceed it. With these caveats in mind, fields in the top right quadrant of Figure 4, below, are the ones meeting the performance standards on both dimensions.

Among the five most common very-short-term certificates awarded in Washington state—teacher education, vehicle maintenance and repair, medical assisting, clinical lab sciences, and practical nursing—all have more than 70 percent of graduates employed one year after completion. Additionally, all but one program, practical nursing, have median earnings above the approximate $23,475 threshold.

Not all programs would clear these standards, however. A number of programs—business administration and management, computer programming, and human development and family studies (which includes child care provider programs), among others—have employment rates below 70 percent, for example. (See Appendix Table A9 for additional fields of study.) Individual programs may also fail to meet the standards, even when the field more broadly does.

Again, this analysis is only suggestive about the programs that may be at risk of not satisfying some of the eligibility criteria for Workforce Pell. The analysis could change as operational details about performance metrics (especially job placement rates) are solidified. For instance, some variation in measured performance could be due to differences across fields in the coverage of wage reporting data for state unemployment insurance that we use here, and it is possible states will be permitted to incorporate additional data as Workforce Pell implementation proceeds.[12]

Figure 4: Relationship Between the Share of Graduates Employed and Median Annual Earnings, One Year Post-Completion, by Field of Study for Very-Short-Term (1–19 Credits) Certificates

Notes: These data reflect the share of graduates employed and the median annual earnings one year post-completion for the 2020 completer cohort, and include all very-short-term (1–19 credits) certificate programs. The most commonly awarded very-short-term certificates are indicated by the solid orange dots and corresponding labels. For the most recent detailed data on median earnings and percent employed by field of study and credential type, see Appendix Table A9. Earnings are reported in real 2025 dollars.

CONCLUSION

As Workforce Pell implementation ramps up across the country, states like Washington will learn more about the current short-term program offerings in their state—and, importantly, how they compare with other types of certificates and degrees. This report offers a first look at the types of short-term credentials that might qualify for Workforce Pell in Washington state, and the characteristics of the students they serve. While there is considerably more work to do to identify the programs that fit the specific program length benchmarks for Workforce Pell programs, we find substantial variation in the earnings and employment outcomes of the programs—factors that could affect whether programs qualify for Pell Grants if they do not meet the job placement rate and earnings standards of the new federal framework.

More broadly, these data provide a foundation for states to consider the labor market returns of their sub-baccalaureate credentials across all types of programs—including not only Workforce Pell, but also the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, Perkins Career and Technical Education funding, and other types of federal financial aid from the U.S. Department of Education; servicemember and veterans education benefits; and state grant and loan programs. States have a unique role to play in helping to ensure their residents see positive economic returns to their higher education and workforce training programs, and data like these help to lay the groundwork for measuring and understanding the outcomes of program graduates.

APPENDIX

Types of Programs

Table A1: Share of Awards in the Top 10 Fields of Study in 2023 for Very-Long-Term Certificates

Very-Long-Term Certificates (90+ Credits or 1,800+ Hours)	
Top Fields of Study in 2023	
Carpentry (4602)	62.5
Building Finishing & Mgmt (4604)	25.0
Interdisc. Studies (gen.) (3000)	12.5

This portion of the table was excluded from the body of the report due to a small number of certificate programs offered at 90+ credits. There were no programs in these fields of study reported in 2015.

Demographics of Students

Table A2: Demographics of Students Earning Very-Short-Term Certificates (1–19 Credit Hours), for the Top Five Fields of Study

	Field of Study (4-Digit CIP)				
	Teacher Ed: Levels & Methods (1312)	**Vehicle Maintenance & Repair (4706)**	**Medical Assisting (5108)**	**Clinical Lab Science (5110)**	**Practical Nursing (5139)**
Age (%)					
Under 20	5.0	19.8	13.7	6.9	20.5
20–23	13.9	23.9	30.8	22.8	25.7
24–25	6.0	7.2	12.1	10.7	8.4
26–29	13.5	12.2	17.0	16.7	13.4
30+	61.6	36.9	26.4	42.9	32.0
Gender (%)					
Female	92.1	14.7	36.8	82.3	81.8
Race/Ethnicity (%)					
American Indian/ Alaska Native	1.0	-	-	-	-
Asian	8.4	21.2	5.5	12.2	8.9
Black	8.3	4.0	1.6	7.5	5.7
Latino/a	29.5	14.1	10.7	21.3	19.7
Multi-racial	5.0	3.4	6.3	5.2	6.6
White	35.3	42.4	63.9	42.4	48.0
Unknown Race/Eth	8.6	9.9	9.4	8.3	7.9
Other Characteristics					
WA Resident (%)	73.3	71.2	76.0	76.1	71.8

Notes: Characteristics for the combined set of students in 2018–22. Data are excluded (-) if the number of students in a category is too small to report.

Table A3: Demographics of Students Earning Short-Term Certificates (20–44 Credit Hours), for the Top Five Fields of Study

	Field of Study (4-Digit CIP)				
	Teacher Ed: Levels & Methods (1312)	Industrial Production Tech (1506)	Vehicle Maintenance & Repair (4706)	Precision Metal Working (4805)	Health Admin Services (5107)
Age (%)					
Under 20	2.5	-	15.0	13.9	-
20–23	12.4	20.5	30.2	23.0	9.5
24–25	6.5	14.0	6.9	6.8	6.2
26–29	12.0	24.9	14.1	13.8	16.6
30+	66.6	38.9	32.2	41.7	64.7
Gender (%)					
Female	93.7	20.8	8.0	9.8	89.5
Race/Ethnicity (%)					
American Indian/ Alaska Native	-	-	-	-	-
Asian	5.8	7.5	6.1	4.1	5.8
Black	6.1	2.3	3.3	1.4	7.9
Latino/a	40.8	7.7	20.6	12.3	12.2
Multi-racial	4.6	7.3	2.7	4.5	3.7
White	31.5	64.7	50.2	61.4	55.1
Unknown Race/Eth	8.1	5.4	8.6	6.4	8.5
Other Characteristics					
WA Resident (%)	72.6	88.4	71.4	80.5	67.4

Notes: Characteristics for the combined set of students in 2018-22. Data are excluded (-) if the number of students in a category is too small to report.

Table A4: Demographics of Students Earning Long-Term Certificates (45–89 Credit Hours), for the Top Five Fields of Study

	Field of Study (4-Digit CIP)				
	Vehicle Maintenance & Repair (4706)	Precision Metal Working (4805)	Health Admin Services (5107)	Medical Assisting (5108)	Practical Nursing (5139)
Age (%)					
Under 20	10.6	9.4	-	2.7	-
20–23	30.5	20.1	6.2	26.0	10.8
24–25	7.7	3.9	2.4	11.7	9.6
26–29	16.6	13.6	12.7	16.0	21.6
30+	33.0	47.4	71.2	42.9	55.4
Gender (%)					
Female	4.5	6.9	88.5	83.5	85.9
Race/Ethnicity (%)					
American Indian/ Alaska Native	-	-	-	-	-
Asian	19.5	-	10.0	12.2	13.6
Black	4.6	1.8	3.8	4.8	13.6
Latino/a	13.9	8.8	6.9	20.9	6.9
Multi-racial	2.7	-	-	4.4	0.0
White	42.5	66.2	58.4	45.3	44.6
Unknown Race/Eth	7.5	7.0	4.5	8.1	6.5
Other Characteristics					
WA Resident (%)	61.0	66.8	80.1	74.9	75.1

Notes: Characteristics for the combined set of students in 2018-22. Data are excluded (-) if the number of students in a category is too small to report.

Table A5: Demographics of Students Earning Associate Degrees, for the Top Five Fields of Study

	Field of Study (4-Digit CIP)				
	Liberal Arts & Humanities (2401)	Physical Sciences, Gen (4001)	Medical Assisting (5108)	Registered Nursing (5138)	Business/ Commerce (Gen.) (5201)
Age (%)					
Under 20	38.4	30.3	2.2	0.0	21.8
20–23	35.3	41.0	22.8	16.9	47.1
24–25	5.9	8.2	12.2	12.1	7.6
26–29	7.5	10.3	20.4	22.0	9.8
30+	12.9	10.3	42.5	48.9	13.7
Gender (%)					
Female	61.3	23.5	83.2	81.1	47.9
Race/Ethnicity (%)					
American Indian/ Alaska Native	0.7	-	-	0.6	-
Asian	12.4	34.6	10.4	10.4	31.1
Black	3.5	3.7	4.5	3.9	3.2
Latino/a	14.4	7.2	15.6	10.0	10.4
Multi-racial	7.3	6.1	5.7	5.7	5.2
White	49.8	32.9	53.3	59.8	36.0
Unknown Race/Eth	10.4	13.5	7.7	7.8	12.0
Other Characteristics					
WA Resident (%)	76.0	52.7	78.3	77.8	56.3

Notes: Characteristics for the combined set of students in 2018-22. Data are excluded (-) if the number of students in a category is too small to report.

Earnings and Employment Outcomes of Programs

Table A6: Median Earnings at Years Relative to Graduation (2015 Completion Cohort), by Field of Study and Credential Type (in 2025 Dollars)

	Very-Short-Term Certificates (1–19 Credits)			Short-Term Certificates (20–44 Credits)			Long-Term Certificates (45–89 Credits/ 900–1,799 Hours)		
	YEARS AFTER COMPLETION			YEARS AFTER COMPLETION			YEARS AFTER COMPLETION		
	1 Year	3 Years	8 Years	1 Year	3 Years	8 Years	1 Year	3 Years	8 Years
Accounting & Related (5203)	16,758	25,157	52,109	26,916	47,010	61,720	18,594	43,047	60,060
Agricultural Production (103)	50,644	59,747	68,702						
Air Transportation (4901)	23,269	42,937	87,127						
Allied Health Diagnostic (5109)	33,227	55,728	94,052	39,814	51,496	69,537	57,450	79,955	115,207
Applied Horticulture (106)	42,778	41,381	50,842	11,755	19,802	55,104	16,746	21,800	48,616
Audiovisual Comm Tech (1002)				18,079	35,904	54,999			
Building Finishing & Mgmt (4604)	8,645	20,826	33,979	21,774	33,524	63,061			
Business Admin & Mgmt (5202)	38,755	55,104	70,712	45,421	64,477	73,291	32,544	51,728	66,881
Business Support Services (5204)	15,336	37,680	53,053	13,307	33,251	52,440	16,009	33,732	42,791
Carpentry (4602)	15,693	40,114	64,196				13,353	26,489	77,057
Clinical Lab Science (5110)	28,396	43,426	58,402	32,395	46,094	68,144	58,324	76,295	128,163
Computer Programming (1102)	22,883	61,294	88,422	21,929	62,960	122,110	27,036	47,820	103,385
Construction Trades (other) (4699)	18,644	25,765	39,098	17,137	40,591	74,307			
Cosmetology & Grooming (1204)				20,410	31,507	23,215	14,219	36,589	57,095
Criminal Justice & Corrections (4301)				23,832	53,612	61,658			
Culinary & Personal, Other (1299)	7,417	25,425	56,937						
Culinary Arts & Svcs (1205)	18,520	37,056	43,990	8,659	26,831	46,169	19,076	31,626	45,218
Data Entry/Microcomputer Apps (1106)	16,056	34,377	53,479	17,399	45,808	62,043	33,138	46,902	83,912
Dental Support Services (5106)	51,464	64,713	71,701	21,895	43,534	47,983	28,495	43,367	61,717
Design & Applied Arts (5004)				12,315	24,286	54,350			
Drafting/Design Engr Tech (1513)	26,140	62,777	88,199	31,706	62,535	87,693	36,351	57,657	82,640
Electrical & Power Install (4603)							20,526	47,327	81,775
Electrical/Electronic Engr Tech (1503)	24,502	51,401	66,434						
Electrical/Electronics Repair (4701)	35,810	60,631	91,500				14,650	84,313	133,136
Engineering Tech, General (1500)	40,844	66,329	90,979	34,334	56,502	83,398			
Entrepreneurship & Sm Bus (5207)				5,375	20,483	36,851			
Environ/Resource Mgmt & Policy (302)				13,895	45,675	49,819			
Family & Consumer Sci (gen.) (1901)	28,072	24,384	49,615	29,417	42,117	69,432			
Fire Protection (4302)	26,888	49,459	139,128	73,769	134,657	166,906			
Foreign Languages, Other (1699)	17,094	37,248	44,749						
Forestry (305)				10,231	29,983	40,000			
General Sales & Marketing (5218)	28,602	49,740	62,262	29,053	43,243	45,123			
Ground Transportation (4902)	25,480	35,821	56,987	31,474	54,119	61,440			
HVAC & Refrigeration Repair (4702)				52,261	84,100	85,782	13,854	36,061	65,198
Health Admin Services (5107)	19,232	37,933	58,024	20,370	43,311	57,687	24,721	44,303	57,837
Health Aides & Attendants (5126)	34,133	53,991	70,111						
Health Professions (other) (5199)				24,242	41,682	58,092			

	Very-Short-Term Certificates (1–19 Credits)			Short-Term Certificates (20–44 Credits)			Long-Term Certificates (45–89 Credits/ 900–1,799 Hours)		
	YEARS AFTER COMPLETION			YEARS AFTER COMPLETION			YEARS AFTER COMPLETION		
	1 Year	3 Years	8 Years	1 Year	3 Years	8 Years	1 Year	3 Years	8 Years
Heavy/Industrial Equip. Repair (4703)							27,199	153,391	151,679
Hospitality Mgmt (5209)	12,046	33,781	66,150	27,593	37,626	64,407	12,132	35,391	15,901
Human Resources Mgmt (5210)				35,880	67,115	85,301	35,500	42,992	62,621
IT Admin & Mgmt (1110)	20,096	52,588	75,589	34,582	57,576	73,158	12,800	29,330	51,361
Industrial Production Tech (1506)	21,589	40,321	65,078	29,096	54,297	71,238	34,100	52,894	69,152
Leatherworking & Upholstery (4803)				12,099	20,314	48,452	4,782	38,777	53,778
Legal Support Services (2203)				38,754	59,739	86,875	27,890	47,285	74,238
Marine Transportation (4903)							35,885	61,766	115,576
Marketing (5214)	12,220	27,827	61,791	35,169	54,942	73,424	23,456	44,499	48,521
Mechanic & Repair Tech (other) (4799)	55,017	72,526	98,492						
Medical Assisting (5108)	30,483	51,236	96,169	32,043	48,248	80,379	32,604	47,196	61,901
Mental Health Services (5115)	30,402	40,298	53,472	16,453	34,222	57,747	36,604	57,231	71,797
Missing (.)				20,819	43,981	48,562			
Music (5009)				23,489	48,466	56,499			
Networking & Telecom (1109)	17,137	61,353	88,980	36,720	50,685	97,784	24,244	66,567	84,264
Optometric Support Svcs (5118)							47,728	60,426	95,697
Practical Nursing (5139)	17,935	34,335	63,366	17,981	34,073	57,962	37,813	83,520	105,579
Precision Metal Working (4805)	35,901	57,449	78,196	26,023	51,484	69,576	21,546	45,777	51,373
Precision Systems Repair (4704)							11,315	29,520	54,346
Software & Media Apps (1108)	18,651	45,381	80,284	25,365	40,056	72,728	19,052	36,896	46,471
Somatic Bodywork (5135)	24,003	30,097	45,119	10,055	26,927	50,878	16,128	23,544	28,658
Specialized Sales & Mktg (5219)				34,064	57,525	66,796	7,573	23,750	49,342
Sports, Kinesiology & PE (3105)	13,640	30,468	58,515	21,962	29,811	63,179			
Teacher Ed: Levels & Methods (1312)	23,801	32,894	43,537	25,082	34,680	47,709	26,358	32,637	47,978
Teaching Assistants/Aides (1315)				27,862	38,686	57,459			
Vehicle Maintenance & Repair (4706)	33,477	58,071	85,868	29,311	52,888	73,319	25,907	47,040	66,162

Table A7: Median Earnings at Three Years After Completion (2020 Completion Cohort), by Field of Study and Credential Type (in 2025 Dollars)

	Very-Short-Term Certificates (1–19 Credits)	Short-Term Certificates (20–44 Credits)	Long-Term Certificates (45–89 Credits/ 900–1,799 Hours)
Accounting & Related (5203)	47,905	41,911	52,252
Air Transportation (4901)	38,914	45,279	
Allied Health Diagnostic (5109)	42,094		60,406
Applied Horticulture (106)	21,470	52,101	
Architectural Engr Tech (1501)			55,497
Audiovisual Comm Tech (1002)		28,591	
Building Finishing & Mgmt (4604)	38,011	37,983	
Business Admin & Mgmt (5202)	60,760	63,908	55,487
Business Support Services (5204)	42,332	34,920	34,131
Carpentry (4602)	31,893	50,382	44,124
Clinical Lab Science (5110)	50,628	49,939	72,027
Computer Programming (1102)	55,845	42,527	47,017
Construction Trades (other) (4699)	29,887	52,876	
Cosmetology & Grooming (1204)		39,788	42,454
Criminal Justice & Corrections (4301)	42,405	47,039	
Culinary Arts & Svcs (1205)		33,148	40,043
Data Entry/Microcomputer Apps (1106)	42,424	66,997	
Data Processing (1103)	64,055		
Dental Support Services (5106)		36,771	41,677
Design & Applied Arts (5004)	34,803	23,050	
Drafting/Design Engr Tech (1513)	67,472		52,935
Electrical & Power Install (4603)	75,346	69,472	67,185
Electrical/Electronics Repair (4701)	63,174		
Electromechanical Tech (1504)		68,788	
Engineering Tech, General (1500)	51,292		
Entrepreneurship & Sm Bus (5207)	47,701	40,480	36,053
Environ/Resource Mgmt & Policy (302)		67,467	
Family & Consumer Sci (gen.) (1901)	29,372		
Fire Protection (4302)		129,244	
Foreign Languages, Other (1699)	35,958		
General Sales & Marketing (5218)	45,209		
Ground Transportation (4902)	67,992	54,601	
HVAC & Refrigeration Repair (4702)		57,454	74,263
Health Admin Services (5107)	36,549	46,162	43,099
Heavy/Industrial Equip. Repair (4703)	61,617	85,909	78,331
Hospitality Mgmt (5209)	68,131		
Human Devel. & Family Studies (1907)	37,374		
Human Resources Mgmt (5210)		102,453	22,233
Human Services (gen.) (4400)	37,544		
IT Admin & Mgmt (1110)	58,909	62,472	64,136
Industrial Production Tech (1506)	54,059	39,496	64,802

	Very-Short-Term Certificates (1–19 Credits)	Short-Term Certificates (20–44 Credits)	Long-Term Certificates (45–89 Credits/ 900–1,799 Hours)
Leatherworking & Upholstery (4803)		33,296	72,662
Legal Support Services (2203)		68,144	56,118
Marine Transportation (4903)			92,979
Marketing (5214)	26,294	79,621	54,730
Medical Assisting (5108)	54,998	38,719	53,410
Mental Health Services (5115)	55,112	30,042	59,363
Music (5009)	37,374		
Networking & Telecom (1109)	57,178	51,445	48,509
Practical Nursing (5139)	40,959	36,356	67,537
Precision Metal Working (4805)	65,649	59,717	49,456
Precision Systems Repair (4704)			38,780
Quality Control & Safety Tech (1507)		105,865	
Software & Media Apps (1108)	37,538	58,097	65,558
Somatic Bodywork (5135)		40,273	25,934
Teacher Ed: Levels & Methods (1312)	40,364	40,294	42,001
Vehicle Maintenance & Repair (4706)	64,289	65,030	63,930
Vet & Animal Health Tech (183)		27,627	

Table A8: Median Hourly Wages at Three Years After Completion (2020 Completion Cohort), by Field of Study and Credential Type (in 2025 Dollars)

	Very-Short-Term Certificates (1–19 Credits)	Short-Term Certificates (20–44 Credits)	Long-Term Certificates (45–89 Credits/ 900–1,799 Hours)
Accounting & Related (5203)	35.66	31.57	34.01
Air Transportation (4901)	32.74	33.21	
Allied Health Diagnostic (5109)	36.20		43.83
Applied Horticulture (106)	24.79	29.43	
Architectural Engr Tech (1501)			33.48
Audiovisual Comm Tech (1002)		33.40	
Building Finishing & Mgmt (4604)	29.52	31.09	
Business Admin & Mgmt (5202)	39.29	36.81	32.31
Business Support Services (5204)	28.10	28.85	27.16
Carpentry (4602)	27.87	32.38	28.83
Clinical Lab Science (5110)	32.04	33.36	47.81
Computer Programming (1102)	39.21	37.86	39.28
Construction Trades (other) (4699)	30.38	31.93	
Cosmetology & Grooming (1204)		26.24	37.15
Criminal Justice & Corrections (4301)	32.82	30.93	
Culinary Arts & Svcs (1205)		26.74	27.49
Data Entry/Microcomputer Apps (1106)	28.76	40.02	
Data Processing (1103)	43.13		
Dental Support Services (5106)		29.42	33.56
Design & Applied Arts (5004)	29.69	22.42	
Drafting/Design Engr Tech (1513)	40.53		34.08
Electrical & Power Install (4603)	43.15	46.98	42.64
Electrical/Electronics Repair (4701)	31.87		
Electromechanical Tech (1504)		39.53	
Engineering Tech, General (1500)	30.29		
Entrepreneurship & Sm Bus (5207)	38.47	28.21	31.57
Environ/Resource Mgmt & Policy (302)		37.39	
Family & Consumer Sci (gen.) (1901)	34.62		
Fire Protection (4302)		61.88	
Foreign Languages, Other (1699)	29.29		
General Sales & Marketing (5218)	27.80		
Ground Transportation (4902)	39.41	38.55	
HVAC & Refrigeration Repair (4702)		43.90	43.92
Health Admin Services (5107)	25.78	29.92	28.95
Heavy/Industrial Equip. Repair (4703)	39.54	46.24	51.75
Hospitality Mgmt (5209)	36.58		
Human Devel. & Family Studies (1907)	48.70		
Human Resources Mgmt (5210)		49.20	33.55
Human Services (gen.) (4400)	31.18		
IT Admin & Mgmt (1110)	37.94	38.84	41.55
Industrial Production Tech (1506)	35.70	33.49	33.25

	Very-Short-Term Certificates (1–19 Credits)	Short-Term Certificates (20–44 Credits)	Long-Term Certificates (45–89 Credits/ 900–1,799 Hours)
Leatherworking & Upholstery (4803)		33.36	29.96
Legal Support Services (2203)		39.86	36.96
Marine Transportation (4903)			44.68
Marketing (5214)	30.70	40.45	34.88
Medical Assisting (5108)	34.82	29.18	32.04
Mental Health Services (5115)	34.86	35.93	37.90
Music (5009)	31.69		
Networking & Telecom (1109)	32.76	34.85	33.22
Practical Nursing (5139)	31.38	26.68	48.87
Precision Metal Working (4805)	35.43	34.12	31.79
Precision Systems Repair (4704)			29.86
Quality Control & Safety Tech (1507)		47.60	
Software & Media Apps (1108)	36.22	34.77	34.09
Somatic Bodywork (5135)		38.42	34.01
Teacher Ed: Levels & Methods (1312)	29.16	28.40	31.52
Vehicle Maintenance & Repair (4706)	33.11	36.04	36.54
Vet & Animal Health Tech (183)		26.67	

Table A9: Median Earnings and Percent Employed One Year After Completion (2020 Completion Cohort), by Field of Study and Credential Type (in 2025 Dollars)

	Very-Short-Term Certificates (1–19 Credits)		Short-Term Certificates (20–44 Credits)		Long-Term Certificates (45–89 Credits/ 900–1,799 Hours)	
	% Employed	Median Earnings	% Employed	Median Earnings	% Employed	Median Earnings
Accounting & Related (5203)	59.3	22,295	54.5	26,046	68.5	30,987
Air Transportation (4901)	46.4	20,933	61.3	36,500		
Allied Health Diagnostic (5109)	71.9	36,149			81.1	50,632
Applied Horticulture (106)	27.1	11,840	36.4	14,283		
Architectural Engr Tech (1501)					70.6	16,093
Audiovisual Comm Tech (1002)			79.2	11,143		
Building Finishing & Mgmt (4604)	50.0	13,744	40.4	16,406		
Business Admin & Mgmt (5202)	52.7	42,912	69.3	48,475	62.9	47,479
Business Support Services (5204)	57.1	23,798	52.6	22,924	58.8	15,678
Carpentry (4602)	53.6	11,635	81.8	27,000	53.3	25,633
Clinical Lab Science (5110)	87.9	34,287	75.3	30,774	82.8	32,823
Computer Programming (1102)	51.4	26,257	64.3	15,398	46.4	18,735
Construction Trades (other) (4699)	50.0	4,730	61.1	22,013		
Cosmetology & Grooming (1204)			85.7	14,234	40.0	6,837
Criminal Justice & Corrections (4301)	70.8	44,846	84.6	29,832		
Culinary Arts & Svcs (1205)			47.1	23,956	70.8	20,192
Data Entry/Microcomputer Apps (1106)	41.7	8,295	77.5	33,999		
Data Processing (1103)	76.9	55,734				
Dental Support Services (5106)			92.9	29,609	94.1	38,081
Design & Applied Arts (5004)	56.1	13,141	36.4	8,990		
Drafting/Design Engr Tech (1513)	73.3	41,288			39.3	31,183
Electrical & Power Install (4603)	63.6	16,517	74.4	37,342	79.2	30,192
Electrical/Electronics Repair (4701)	86.4	33,643				
Electromechanical Tech (1504)			68.8	29,672		
Engineering Tech, General (1500)	46.3	24,105				
Entrepreneurship & Sm Bus (5207)	57.9	31,524	38.6	12,261	50.0	16,680
Environ/Resource Mgmt & Policy (302)			82.4	33,797		
Family & Consumer Sci (gen.) (1901)	40.0	29,136				
Fire Protection (4302)			100.0	100,587		
Foreign Languages, Other (1699)	73.5	31,127				
General Sales & Marketing (5218)	48.7	9,597				
Ground Transportation (4902)	88.8	49,774	81.2	41,740		
HVAC & Refrigeration Repair (4702)			92.3	20,408	63.6	34,489
Health Admin Services (5107)	72.6	20,301	63.9	23,180	60.4	27,182
Heavy/Industrial Equip. Repair (4703)	68.2	24,634	75.0	49,280	66.7	43,287
Hospitality Mgmt (5209)	36.4	67,315				
Human Devel. & Family Studies (1907)	40.1	37,580				
Human Resources Mgmt (5210)			50.0	36,770	46.2	36,325
Human Services (gen.) (4400)	36.4	11,148				

	Very-Short-Term Certificates (1–19 Credits)		Short-Term Certificates (20–44 Credits)		Long-Term Certificates (45–89 Credits/ 900–1,799 Hours)	
	% Employed	Median Earnings	% Employed	Median Earnings	% Employed	Median Earnings
IT Admin & Mgmt (1110)	57.3	28,072	52.8	30,901	71.2	31,790
Industrial Production Tech (1506)	27.2	22,767	15.4	23,641	20.9	45,786
Leatherworking & Upholstery (4803)			30.0	17,659	7.1	504
Legal Support Services (2203)			75.6	42,597	60.0	47,288
Marine Transportation (4903)					73.3	38,388
Marketing (5214)	68.8	25,155	65.4	53,048	72.2	71,763
Medical Assisting (5108)	86.6	33,536	82.1	33,355	89.0	37,880
Mental Health Services (5115)	74.6	45,220	54.5	42,061	89.1	43,572
Music (5009)	65.2	22,183				
Networking & Telecom (1109)	53.8	34,750	70.6	23,344	60.7	22,326
Practical Nursing (5139)	75.6	21,533	85.1	20,290	91.9	47,781
Precision Metal Working (4805)	71.0	36,445	64.1	31,344	55.3	31,450
Precision Systems Repair (4704)					46.2	21,308
Quality Control & Safety Tech (1507)			73.3	72,069		
Software & Media Apps (1108)	55.6	27,606	62.5	43,226	25.8	19,356
Somatic Bodywork (5135)			73.7	13,823	71.0	28,637
Teacher Ed: Levels & Methods (1312)	71.7	33,248	64.3	32,594	68.5	34,904
Vehicle Maintenance & Repair (4706)	76.8	30,267	72.0	25,681	63.5	32,203
Vet & Animal Health Tech (183)			78.1	26,069		

ENDNOTES

1 Clock-hour programs (for the purposes of federal financial aid) are those required to measure their students' learning in clock hours for state or federal approval or for licensure. Programs operating in credit hours can qualify for Workforce Pell Grants if they are between 8 and 14 weeks and between 4 and 15 semester/trimester hours or between 6 and 23 quarter hours. (34 CFR 690.92(a) and (b).)

2 The research presented here uses confidential data from the Education Research and Data Center (ERDC) located within the Washington Office of Financial Management (OFM). ERDC's data system is a statewide longitudinal data system that includes de-identified data about people's preschool, educational, and workforce experiences. The views expressed here are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of OFM or other data contributors. Any errors are attributable to the authors.

3 Correspondence programs, which are programs offered online or otherwise at a distance but which do not have regular and substantive interaction between students and the instructor, are not permitted.

4 For instance, some institutions have used prior learning assessment or other credit-transfer structures to assess and provide credit for learning in programs that are not broadly offered for credit.

5 The federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and the Perkins Career and Technical Education Act.

6 States will produce job placement rates by matching higher education records for students from particular programs (defined by the Classification of Institutional Programs [CIP] taxonomy) with Unemployment Insurance records. From AY 2026–27 through AY 2028–29, states can measure a job placement rate instead as an "employment rate" – the share of graduates who are working during the second quarter after graduation. Beginning in AY 2029-2030, states are instead expected to measure whether graduates are working in the occupation for which the program prepares students. Most states do not currently collect the occupations of workers, making this a significant challenge; Washington State is one of the few states that does collect the information, and future research will explore those data further.

7 Certificates awarded at public institutions account for 82 percent of all certificates awarded in Washington state between 2015 and 2024. (Source: Authors' calculations of IPEDS completions data.)

8 There are few very-long-term certificates of 90+ credits or 1,800+ hours awarded in Washington state; we include them here for context, but further analysis of these certificates is limited to the Appendix. The majority of these very-long-term certificates (62.5 percent) are awarded in carpentry; another 25 percent are awarded in building finishing and management.

9 This field of study encompasses teacher education and professional development. It covers fields of study geared to prepare educators for distinct age groups and environments such as early childhood education, elementary education, secondary education, or adult and continuing education.

10 In 2023, the minimum wage in Washington state was $15.74 per hour ($18.69 in Seattle), which is twice the federal minimum wage and the highest in the country.

11 The administrative data used here to measure employment are from Washington's Unemployment Insurance system. Therefore, individuals working in employment not covered by UI will not be captured by these data. These include self-employed individuals, federal workers, and military service members, so our estimates may undercount the employment rates of graduates.

12 For example, a similar measure under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) allows states to capture employment for workers who would be excluded from state Unemployment Insurance data systems using alternate data sources, which may increase the coverage of these metrics.