

Many Community College Grads Earn More than Those with Bachelor's Degrees

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GODFREY – Nearly 30 percent of Americans with associate degrees earn more money than those with bachelor's degrees, according to Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce. In fact, on average, community college graduates right out of school earn more than graduates of four-year universities.

Whitney Joy is living proof. Before becoming a Lewis and Clark Community College graduate, Joy earned her bachelor's degree in communications in 2005, but had no success finding a career in her field.



“I was discouraged waiting tables, so I began to kick around the idea of going to school again,” Joy said. “My mother-in-law graduated from L&C’s nursing program and

always had positive things to say about the college. Due to her experience and articles I kept reading about community college graduates having success post-graduation, I decided to attend L&C. This was one of the best decisions I have made in my life.”

Joy graduated from L&C with her Associate of Applied Science in Occupational Therapy Assisting in 2012. She is now a successful certified pediatric occupational therapy assistant in West Memphis, Ark. She aspires to earn her master’s degree in occupational therapy and specialize in pediatrics.

“I always wanted to be in the allied health field, but I let my fears prevent me from pursuing a career in this field when I was going to school for a bachelor’s degree,” Joy said. “I researched occupational therapy immensely and determined that this field would be perfect for me because it combined my love of helping others and my background in communications. While at L&C, I had the opportunity to shadow an occupational therapy practitioner to make sure I made the right choice. I haven’t looked back since.”

According to Georgetown’s study, an estimated 29 million middle class jobs require only an associate degree, but only 10 percent of American workers have the sub-baccalaureate degrees needed to fill these positions. Other hurdles those with their bachelor’s degrees face include large student loan debt and the ability to find job openings in their fields.

The increase in wages for community college grads is being driven by a high demand for skilled workers who often need no more than an associate degree to work in a variety of careers, including lab technicians, teachers in early childhood programs, computer engineers, draftsmen, therapists and machinists.

With a two-year community college degree, computer network analysts make an annual median average of \$73,050, dental hygienists make \$74,568, architects make \$67,350, occupational therapy assistants make \$59,114 and paralegal assistants make \$55,037, according to Career Coach. All the degrees required for these careers can be earned at Lewis and Clark.

“I had no direction, career-wise, before attending Lewis and Clark,” Joy said. “Through the scholarships I received from the college, and by graduating from the OTA program with honors, I gained confidence again in my abilities. I wouldn’t be where I am today without the education I received at L&C.”

Occupational therapy is just one of the disciplines that can be studied at L&C. To learn more about L&C’s degrees and certificates and explore career options, visit www.lc.edu/credit-programs.

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