

Sen Jarvis: Six-figure Jobs That Don't Require A Degree

By Administrator
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By North Carolina Senator Steve Jarvis If you have children, you've probably played the board game "Life." Players reach a key crossroad early in the game: Choose to go to college, which sets you back a few spaces but ups your odds of winning the game, or choose not to, which puts you ahead briefly but may hurt you in the long run.

For much of the past century that board game concept has manifested itself in real life. That's not the case anymore for an increasing number of youths.

Decades ago, a smaller proportion of students attended college, and they usually earned themselves a good-paying professional job in which they used their minds, not their muscles, to earn a living.

They may have taken on a small amount of student debt, but white-collar salaries paid off that debt in short order, and that was that.

Over time, a key variable in that equation – college tuition – started skyrocketing. As the supply of college-educated professionals keeps increasing, their salaries will plateau or even shrink relative to some non-college-educated positions.

This means the notion that a four-year degree is a ticket to success in life has never been on shakier footing than right now. Soaring tuition and living costs burden students with decades of debt payments, and median salaries in some fields make it mathematically impossible for some borrowers to ever pay off their loans.

Meanwhile, trade and technical school students can graduate with much smaller debt burdens and can earn salaries higher than some positions that require four-year degrees.

For example, electricians, plumbers, elevator repair workers, and radiation therapists all earn an average salary above \$70,000 per year. None of them require a four-year university degree.

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As parents and as a society, we've placed too much prestige in a four-year university degree. It's earned a sort of aura over the decades – a signal to others of a parenting job well done, and of a child destined for a life of upper-middle-class comforts.

That may have been true in the 1950s, but it's not true anymore. Students can break into good-paying industries with a two-year stint at a community college or just a vocational certificate.

Working with your hands might have been some sort of class marker a century ago, but it's not so anymore. The trades are lucrative, and they command respect.

Some teachers and parents have begun to embrace , or at least pay attention to, alternatives to the four-year-degree career pathway. That trend should continue. At its core, a quality education will prepare a student for a self-sufficient, productive life. Two-year and vocational schools do this, and sometimes they do it better than universities.

In recognition of the shift that may soon be underway, the North Carolina legislature has invested growing sums in short-term workforce training and apprenticeship programs. I support this trend and will work to expand it.

Real life isn't a board game. There is no right path that leads you to win the game. It's time to acknowledge and appreciate the plethora of options that our children must be successful.

Instead of forcing them into preconceived notions of success, let's encourage them to find the path fulfills their potential – whether that be a four-year degree, two-year degree, or a vocational certificate.