

Return to College, Boost your Career

BY NORA ZELLUK

YOU MAY HAVE DECIDED you need to add a credential to your resume, or you might be thinking of a college degree to boost your career.

The research would back you up. Data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that earnings consistently increase with level of education. On average, workers over 25 years old with bachelor's degrees earn an astonishing 70 to 80 percent more than their counterparts with high school diplomas. Education beyond a bachelor's degree increases earnings even further.

For many individuals, completing a college degree they may have started earlier in life is an option well worth pursuing, and education researchers project continued growth in the number of individuals enrolling in college after the age of 25.

In addition, people are turning to certificate programs to boost their earnings, add competencies to their professional toolboxes and improve their career prospects. Professional development certificate programs also provide an excellent way to earn a credential or retool for a job change.

Certificates are non-degree programs that offer practical, concentrated study in a particular professional area. They take a relatively short time to complete, often less than a year.

"Certificates are a homegrown American invention and are expanding rapidly in response to a wide range of educational and labor market demands," reported researchers at Georgetown University. A major finding of their study is that the postsecondary certificate has become a cost-effective tool for increasing educational attainment and gainful employment in the U.S.

The study also highlighted the flexibility of certificates, reporting that they can "serve as a stepping stone to further education and training or as a supplement to workers who already have a college degree." For those already employed, researchers reported that certificates "can be the most effective way to catch up, keep up and get ahead in their chosen field," and for the unemployed and underemployed, "certificates can offer a jumpstart in the labor market."

But if it has been a while since you were in school, you may be wondering if college is still right for you. Some prospective returning students feel

unsure whether they could be successful in college-level coursework after being away from a classroom environment for a long time.

But time and again, once they've started, returning college students report finding a renewed commitment for success. "In college this time around, I'm focused and I'm here to earn my degree," said one returning student. "I found that my studying techniques and my time management skills were

much improved from when I was a younger student," reported another.

Most colleges and universities have a continuing education department that will help returning students choose a program or degree that fits with their educational goals and guide them through enrollment or registration process. At the University of Delaware, the ACCESS Center provides free academic advisement for those considering a return to college, whether for a degree or certificate program. Advisors can help identify career and educational goals, develop educational

plans, implement decisions and build learning skills.

To help meet the needs of professionals seeking career advancement or a new credential, the University of Delaware's Division of Professional and Continuing Studies offers a range of professional development certificate programs and short-term courses in the healthcare, legal and business fields.

Offered in Newark, Wilmington or online, this fall's programs include clinical trials management, data analytics, healthcare risk management, human resources/aPHR prep, nursing home administration, paralegal, project management, six sigma and business process improvement, sleep health education, social media marketing, telehealth and an extensive new drone pilot training academy with five courses targeting novice to advanced users.

For more information about UD continuing education and professional development programs, call 302-831-7600, visit www.pcs.udel.edu or email continuing-ed@udel.edu.

To make an appointment with an ACCESS advisor and learn more about career assessment and academic options, call 302-831-8843 or write to access-advise@udel.edu. ■

