

The Importance of Vocational Training in the United States

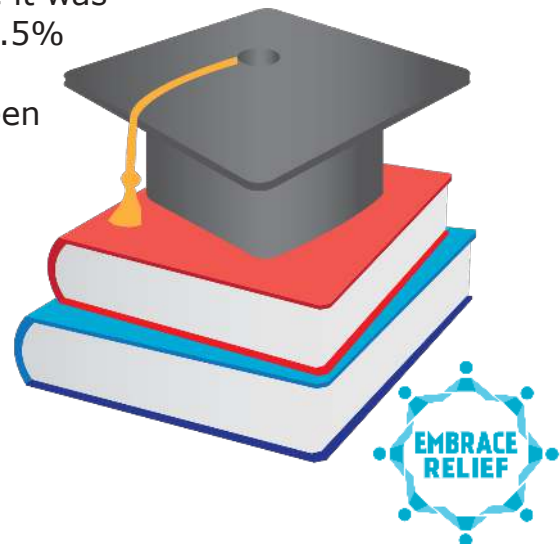
The United States has fallen from a 9.6% unemployment rate in 2010 to a 3.9% unemployment rate in 2018.¹ With such drastic changes in the unemployment rate, the job market in the United States is finally looking hopeful again. As the unemployment rate has decreased, so has the crime rate. In 2010 there were an estimated 403.6 violent crimes per 100,000 residents while in 2016 it decreased to 386.3 violent crimes per 100,000 residents.² This statistic is projected to be around 1.8% lower for 2017 which, if it holds, will be the second-lowest crime rate since 1990.³ **Because of the association between employment rates and crime rates, it is imperative that we continue to study and improve the employment rates in the United States.**

How can we help raise employment rates? **Embrace Relief and GERA have created the GradPlus program to help. It is designed to improve student attendance, increase high school graduation rates, improve self-esteem and confidence, provide individualized support to students as they plan for graduation, and increase student awareness and access to financial support for post-secondary training or education.**

GradPlus focuses on important areas to help students prepare for the future. **First, tutoring and academic support, where twice a week, students will have access to certified teachers in Language Arts and Math that provide tutoring, instructional feedback and academic strategies. Second, guidance is an important facet of personal and academic growth necessary for at-risk students.** Representatives from local agencies and businesses will speak to the students about their own experiences, hardships, and triumphs. Embrace Relief and GERA are committed to keeping students in the classroom and out of trouble, which is possible and plausible through implementation of the GradPlus Program.

GradPlus is designed to help students graduate high school and seek higher education or a career following their graduation. The chances of unemployment for a person tends to decrease with the more education a person receives, and graduating high school is the first step to success. In April 2018, the unemployment rate for a person with less than a high school diploma was 5.9%, for a person with only a high school degree it was 4.3%, for a person with an associate's degree it was 3.5% and for a person with a bachelor's degree or higher it was 2.1%.⁴ Although there is a clear correlation between the amount of education a person receives and the likelihood that they will be employed, there is also the option of vocational training.

Vocational training is training for a specific career or trade that focuses on the practical application of skills learned and is generally unconcerned with theory or traditional



academic skills.⁵ Essentially, vocational training is hands-on training for a specific skill, such as carpentry and plumbing, and it raises the chances of being employed in that field. For example, prospective ironworkers are encouraged to become apprentices to the skilled ironworkers in order to study and hone the craft. An apprentice plumber's duties are similar to their superiors, but their work comes with the nurturing safety of a learning environment. It is a lifelong process of discovering how to mold the practical abilities of one's trade into a profitable career. This is the path for those interested in vocational training. **Instead of going to college and getting a four-year degree, vocational training can help students obtain a license, certification, or degree in a trade. It will not only help students gain experience in a specific field, but they will also graduate from vocational school qualified to begin working immediately.** Vocational training in the United States is of urgent importance.

There is currently a void in the presence of vocational programs due to the majority of employers' demanding a bachelor's degree. Nationwide, this means there is an enormous list for the number of jobs that either require or prefer applicants with a diploma. In his post, "Wanted for any job: A bachelor's degree...," Jeffrey Selingo describes what economists refer to as "degree inflation," a situation where different industries and jobs that never required a bachelor's degree are now adding it to their requirements.⁶ A report presented by Harvard Business School, Accenture, and Grads of Life, found that 6 million jobs are "at risk of degree inflation" because employers equate a college diploma to suitable skills and competencies, regardless of the field of discipline.⁷ As a result, the stigma of vocational training has increased, leaving some students with a distaste for industrial field-related technical knowledge and "the nation's factories with far fewer skilled workers than needed."⁸ The state of California is spending \$206 million on a campaign to revive and educate average citizens, not just college students, on the value of vocational education.⁹ Meanwhile, in other states, there's a shortage of workers while the financial burden of a bachelor's degree is quickly rising.¹⁰ Although vehemently encouraged to attend college/university, graduates are experiencing a veritable drought of jobs that provide an appropriate income for the expense made over their 4-6 years of schooling. On the other hand, a news report by the Washington State Auditor found that an abundance of good jobs in skilled trades are not filled because students are devotedly steered towards bachelor's degrees and away from vocations.¹¹

In Michigan, Governor Rick Snyder recently commented on the shortage of workers in the skilled trades and has announced a \$100 million proposal that he likens to the Marshall Plan, also known as the European Recovery Program, which was a U.S. program meant to provide relief to Western Europe after World War II.¹² California has devoted itself to change the stigma behind vocational training by having its community colleges partner with local organizations to reestablish advocacy for trades. By demonstrating how productive this accumulation of resources could be, they were able to diminish the stigma behind vocational training with their program: Doing What Matters.¹³



Doing What Matters was developed and spearheaded by the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office and the Division of Workforce and Economic Development to help bridge the gap between required skills and jobs by preparing California's workforce for the ongoing creation of careers in the 21st century. By collaborating with employers, the local communities and their community colleges, the program was able to form support and funding for those who wished to study courses in vocational training.¹⁴ This program grants additional options for those who aren't entirely certain whether they would like to attend college or enlist in a vocation. There are now ongoing discussions at the federal level regarding Pell Grants, only available for college tuition, to make such grants applicable to short-term job training courses. The Trump Administration has currently been supportive of this idea.¹⁵

It is evident that there are increasing options available for those who do not choose a college degree. The nation needs people who are capable of working specialized vocational jobs. Embrace Relief has noticed this urgency and created GradPlus as an answer to the need for trades such as carpentry, electrical, plumbing, sheet-metal work, and pipe-fitting.¹⁶ Along with these jobs, construction, health-care, and personal-care jobs will account for one-third of the new careers being born into the nation by 2022, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.¹⁷

Trades such as plumbing, sheet-metal work, carpentry, or pipe-fitting, can pay up to \$60,000 yearly, or roughly \$32.42 an hour, which is a noticeable difference compared to the salary of the recent influx of graduates. In 2018, the average salary of college graduates was approximately \$50,390 annually.¹⁸ It is clear that if someone has no intense interest in going to college, that individual can still live a fulfilling and rewarding life. With tutors and guidance, the GradPlus program will provide 'career readiness' for those willing to choose the vocational route. **By evaluating a student's strengths and skills, the facilitators of GradPlus will be able to assist and guide the student with job applications as well as identify potential internship or apprenticeship opportunities. Through the GradPlus program, choosing a vocational school will be a legitimate and positive option for those who have the desire and willingness to chase their dreams.**

¹ "USA - Unemployment Level 1990-2017 | Timeline." Statista. Accessed September 07, 2018. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/193254/unemployment-level-in-the-us-since-1990/>.

² "Violent Crime." FBI. July 25, 2011. Accessed September 07, 2018. <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2010/crime-in-the-u.s.-2010/violent-crime/violent-crime>.

³ "Crime in 2017: A Preliminary Analysis | Brennan Center for Justice." America's Faulty Perception of Crime Rates | Brennan Center for Justice. September 06, 2017. Accessed September 07, 2018. <https://www.brennancenter.org/publication/crime-2017-preliminary-analysis>.

⁴ "Unemployment Rate 2.1 Percent for College Grads, 4.3 Percent for High School Grads in April 2018." U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. May 10, 2018. Accessed September 07, 2018. http://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2018/unemployment-rate-2-1-percent-for-college-grads-4-3-percent-for-high-school-grads-in-april-2018.htm#view_full

⁵ Bindir, Umar. "Vocational Training - WHAT IS VOCATIONAL TRAINING?, OTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR VOCATIONAL TRAINING, CONCLUSION." StateUniversity.com. Accessed September 10, 2018. <http://careers.stateuniversity.com/pages/854/Vocational-Training.html>.

⁶ Selingo, Jeffrey J. "Wanted for Any Job: A Bachelor's Degree. Is That Smart?" The Washington Post, WP Company, 27 Oct. 2017. www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2017/10/27/wanted-for-any-job-a-bachelors-degree-is-that-smart/?hpid=hp_hp-top-table-main-smart-grads%3Ahomepage%2Ftutm_term=.c73285a4d155.

⁷ Selingo, Jeffrey J. "Wanted for Any Job: A Bachelor's Degree. Is That Smart?" The Washington Post, WP Company, 27 Oct. 2017. www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2017/10/27/wanted-for-any-job-a-bachelors-degree-is-that-smart/?hpid=hp_hp-top-table-main-smart-grads%3Ahomepage%2Ftutm_term=.c73285a4d155.

⁸ <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/education/decades-pushing-bachelors-degrees-u-s-needs-tradespeople>

⁹ <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/education/decades-pushing-bachelors-degrees-u-s-needs-tradespeople>

¹⁰ Gross, Ashley, and Jon Marcus. "High-Paying Trade Jobs Sit Empty, While High School Grads Line Up For University." NPR, NPR, 25 Apr. 2018. www.npr.org/sections/ed/2018/04/25/605092520/high-paying-trade-jobs-sit-empty-while-high-school-grads-line-up-for-university.

¹¹ Gross, Ashley, and Jon Marcus. "High-Paying Trade Jobs Sit Empty, While High School Grads Line Up For University." NPR, NPR, 25 Apr. 2018. www.npr.org/sections/ed/2018/04/25/605092520/high-paying-trade-jobs-sit-empty-while-high-school-grads-line-up-for-university.

¹² "Marshall Plan For Talent." Flint Water - Taking Action on Flint Water. www.michigan.gov/ted/0,5863,7-336-85008---,00.html.

¹³ Matters, Doing What. "Overview." Doing What Matters > Overview > DWM Framework > Give Priority. doingwhatmatters.cccco.edu/Overview.aspx.

¹⁴ Matters, Doing What. "Overview." Doing What Matters > Overview > DWM Framework > Give Priority. doingwhatmatters.cccco.edu/Overview.aspx.

¹⁵ Gross, Ashley, and Jon Marcus. "High-Paying Trade Jobs Sit Empty, While High School Grads Line Up For University." NPR, NPR, 25 Apr. 2018. www.npr.org/sections/ed/2018/04/25/605092520/high-paying-trade-jobs-sit-empty-while-high-school-grads-line-up-for-university.

¹⁶ Gross, Ashley, and Jon Marcus. "High-Paying Trade Jobs Sit Empty, While High School Grads Line Up For University." NPR, NPR, 25 Apr. 2018. www.npr.org/sections/ed/2018/04/25/605092520/high-paying-trade-jobs-sit-empty-while-high-school-grads-line-up-for-university.

¹⁷ Gross, Ashley, and Jon Marcus. "High-Paying Trade Jobs Sit Empty, While High School Grads Line Up For University." NPR, NPR, 25 Apr. 2018. www.npr.org/sections/ed/2018/04/25/605092520/high-paying-trade-jobs-sit-empty-while-high-school-grads-line-up-for-university.

¹⁸ Gross, Ashley, and Jon Marcus. "High-Paying Trade Jobs Sit Empty, While High School Grads Line Up For University." NPR, NPR, 25 Apr. 2018. www.npr.org/sections/ed/2018/04/25/605092520/high-paying-trade-jobs-sit-empty-while-high-school-grads-line-up-for-university.

¹⁹ "High Demand, Low Reward: Salaries for 2018 College Graduates Flat, Korn Ferry Analysis Shows." Korn Ferry. www.kornferry.com/press/high-demand-low-reward-salaries-for-2018-college-graduates-flat-korn-ferry-analysis-shows.

