

Comparing college and trade school as real options

By VIRGINIA JUSTICE

Parents want what's best for their children. But what happens when you feel a four-year college education is what your child needs, but they want to pursue a career as an auto mechanic? How should you as a parent react?

Parents worry that the lack of a bachelor's degree means their child will be less prepared for the world of work or lock them into a low wage job for life. This issue has been hitting the radar recently, as more college graduates are facing mountains of debt and difficulty securing a job in their field of study, at the same time the U.S. is suffering from a lack of skilled tradespeople.

A university prep education prepares one to earn an undergrad degree (sometimes more), while a career technical education – often called trade school – prepares a student to work in a skilled trade. Typically, career technical education is more hands-on learning where college prep is more focused on book learning. Is one better than the other?

Not necessarily, though career technical education is usually a



two-year program versus the four years required for a college degree. In terms of cost, two-year programs are almost always less expensive than a four-year degree. And keep in mind that not all careers requiring a bachelor's degree are guaranteed a good salary. For example, a first-year electrician (after completing a paid apprenticeship) is likely to make more than the first-year teacher.

It is important to look at the long-term return on the investment in an education, what the education costs versus lifetime earning potential. Job satisfaction is another big factor. If you spend 40 or more hours a week at work, isn't better to spend that much time

doing something you enjoy?

So, what are the difference in preparing for a university education and a career technical education? Universities require a higher level of math and writing ability than career technical programs. Career technical programs typically require math and writing skills spe-

cifically geared toward a particular career field, often referred to as applied math. This is not necessarily easier; it is simply what is needed to succeed in the industry. For instance, calculating percentages and using fractions may be required, but finding coefficients is not. The same is true for writing skills. Often technical writing skills are more important in industry than being able to format in APA (American Psychological Association) style.

Youth should be encouraged to realistically pursue their passion. If teaching is their passion they will need a four-year degree to teach K-12. However, if their interest is plumbing, electrical installation, auto mechanics, etc. they will not need the four-year education, rather a couple years of trade school, community college or an apprenticeship to gain the skills necessary for an entry level position.

Very often individuals in the trades continue expanding on their skills sets by taking continuing education courses related to their field. Though these don't earn college-level credits, there are colleges and universities that give credit for experiential learning when the



Education

learning can be evaluated through CLEP exams (clep.collegeboard.org) or CAEL (www.cael.org) should an individual decide to pursue a four-year degree in the future.

Some youth simply are not interested in academia; they prefer hands-on learning over reading a book or listening to lectures. Is it fair as parents to insist that they follow a college prep program when they really want to be a diesel mechanic, a plumber, or a carpenter? In any case, without some post-high school training or education the prospects of earning a high salary are very limited. Whether a youth elects to earn a university degree or a two-year certificate or degree, they should be encouraged to follow their passion and be life-long learners.

One of the best places to begin researching careers and the requirements associated with specific jobs is the United States Bureau of Labor statistics (www.bls.gov). The most important thing is ensuring that youth are empowered to make decisions about their future based on fact. Our children need to understand that not having a university degree does not mean they are less valuable or less intelligent than those who do and that just having a university degree does not ensure success in the world of work.

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What's new at Columbia River Health?

New Name! We used to go by Columbia River Community Health Services (CRCHS), but it was a mouthful and we found that people often confused us with other organizations.

New Hours! We expanded our hours to better serve the community and make sure we're here when you need us! We are now open from 7:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday thru Friday and 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturdays!

New Pharmacy! We opened Columbia River Pharmacy when Good Shepherd closed their doors. We saw a need in the community and wanted to make sure our patients would continue to have access to discounted medications.

New Services! We are excited to announce that by Summer of 2019, we will have full dental and optometry clinics right here at our Boardman location!