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Degrees of Opportunity: Aligning Education and Workforce for Utah's Prosperity

Boosting educational attainment, reducing persistent gaps, and ensuring alignment with workforce demands can help expand opportunity and sustain Utah's economic momentum.

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Degrees of Opportunity: Aligning Education and Workforce for Utah's Prosperity

Analysis in Brief

Maintaining Utah's economic strength requires a skilled workforce prepared for an evolving economy. As most jobs call for education beyond high school, increasing postsecondary attainment and aligning credentials with workforce needs will be key to increasing Utah's talent pipeline.

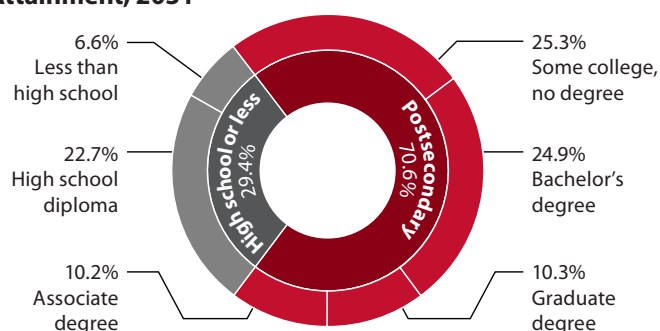
To better understand where opportunities exist for aligning education with workforce demands, this report: (1) projects future workforce needs, emphasizing the importance of postsecondary credentials for stable, higher-wage jobs; (2) examines current degree and certificate completions, highlighting the share that align with in-demand fields; and (3) analyzes educational attainment differences, estimating the additional skilled workers Utah could gain by closing gaps.

Key Findings

- **Future Workforce Demand** – An estimated 70.6% of Utah jobs will require postsecondary education by 2031, highlighting the need for continued postsecondary attainment to meet labor market demands. Nationally, about 85% of “good jobs,” or those that provide a minimum income threshold and potential for wage growth over time, will require some postsecondary education.
- **High Educational Attainment** – Utah currently ranks third nationally for educational attainment and its postsecondary institutions awarded over 70,000 degrees and certificates in 2022-23. Nearly three-quarters of awards from public institutions are considered “high-yield” awards aligned with high-wage, high-demand jobs.
- **Uneven Outcomes** – Utah's high educational attainment varies by income, race/ethnicity, and gender. Existing gaps limit individual opportunity and the state's workforce potential. Economically disadvantaged, male, and Hispanic/Latino students complete credentials at lower rates than their peers.

- **Potential Workforce Gains** – Closing Utah's educational attainment gaps could yield 4,400 additional credential earners in a single high school cohort. This number multiplies over time, strengthening the talent pipeline and expanding the supply of skilled labor.
- **Broader Benefits** – Higher educational attainment correlates with higher earnings, lower poverty and unemployment rates, better health outcomes, and greater civic participation—supporting individual well-being and societal prosperity.

Share of Projected Utah Jobs by Educational Attainment, 2031



Source: Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce

Benefits of Postsecondary Education

Individual	Societal
- Increased earnings - Increased economic mobility - Better health outcomes - Reduced stress - Higher levels of reported happiness - Higher job satisfaction - More likely to receive employer-provided health insurance - More likely to do educational activities with their children	- Increased GDP - Decreased crime - Increased volunteering - Increased voter participation - Increased tax contributions - Lower unemployment rate - Reduced reliance on public assistance - Reduced health care costs - Decreased poverty rate - More engaged communities

Source: Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute based on literature review

Introduction

Utah's economic strength depends on preparing a skilled workforce that meets the demands of a changing economy. As most jobs now require postsecondary education, increasing educational attainment and aligning credentials with workforce needs is central to sustaining economic growth, supporting families, and strengthening communities. This report explores the connection between education and workforce demands in Utah by identifying projected workforce needs, examining the current state of degree and certificate completions, and analyzing opportunities to close gaps in educational attainment and increase the number of skilled workers in Utah. It includes three sections:

1. Employment Outlook and Education Requirements

This section projects the education levels required for Utah's future jobs, highlighting the growing importance of postsecondary credentials for accessing stable, higher-wage employment.

2. Postsecondary Completions and Workforce Supply

This section examines current patterns of degrees and certificates awarded in Utah, highlighting the share aligned with in-demand fields.

3. Educational Attainment Gaps and Labor Force Potential

This section analyzes disparities in educational attainment by income, sex, and race/ethnicity, estimating the additional skilled workers Utah could gain by closing these gaps. It also outlines the broader economic and community benefits associated with higher educational attainment.

Defining "Required Education"

Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce (CEW)

Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce defines "required education" using the distribution of educational attainment levels held by workers within an occupation instead of a fixed minimum standard. This distribution-based approach reflects the diversity of education levels actually observed in the workforce, recognizing that workers in the same role may have varying degrees of formal education.

Utah Department of Workforce Services (DWS)

The Utah Department of Workforce Services uses Occupational Information, a database developed by the U.S. Department of Labor, to define "required education" as the typical minimum level of formal education needed to enter a specific occupation. This measure reflects the baseline qualification most employers expect for entry-level roles and is consistent across the occupation.

These insights demonstrate that increasing educational attainment, closing persistent gaps, and ensuring alignment between postsecondary education and workforce needs can serve as interconnected strategies for strengthening Utah's talent pipeline and sustaining the state's long-term economic momentum.

Employment Outlook and Education Requirements

Workforce projections indicate that most future jobs in Utah will require postsecondary education, with an even larger share of "good jobs" tied to higher education levels (jobs that provide a minimum income threshold and potential for wage growth over time). While these projections vary across industries and occupations, understanding Utah's future workforce needs helps clarify how educational attainment can align with projected demand to support continued economic strength.

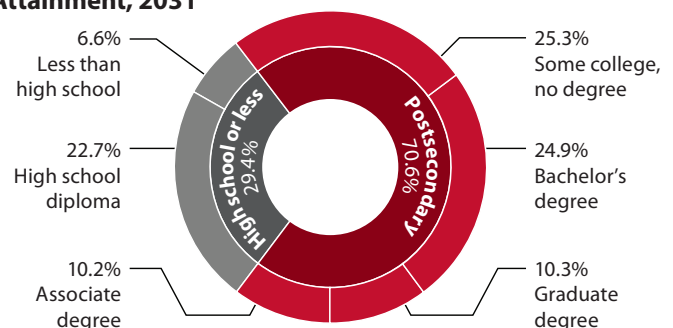
Projected Workforce Demand

An estimated 70.6% of Utah jobs will require some level of postsecondary education by 2031, the ninth highest share nationwide (Figure 1). This high share reflects sustained demand for a skilled workforce that reinforces the importance of postsecondary education. The share has also been relatively consistent over time suggesting that Utah's economy has already shifted toward requiring postsecondary training—and that maintaining or increasing Utah's educational attainment will be necessary for meeting ongoing workforce needs.

Education and Job Quality

National trends further underscore the connection between postsecondary education and job quality. By 2031, the number of "good jobs" in the United States is projected to grow to 87.8 million, accounting for 62% of all employment. About 85% of good jobs will require some postsecondary education. Most of these jobs (66%) are tied to the bachelor's degree pathway, while 19% will be accessible through middle-skill credentials (such as associate degrees or certificates), and 15% through the high school pathway (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Share of Projected Utah Jobs by Educational Attainment, 2031



Note: Required educational attainment measured using the distribution of educational attainment levels held by workers within an occupation, reflecting the diversity of education levels observed in the workforce.

Source: Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce

Defining Job Quality

Georgetown CEW “Good Jobs”

A “good job” provides a minimum income threshold and potential for wage growth over time. Based on 2022 dollars, a good job pays at least:

- \$43,000 and a median of \$74,000 annually for workers ages 25–44.
- \$55,000 and a median of \$91,000 annually for workers ages 45–64.

Median earnings across all good jobs are \$82,000, with most workers earning between \$62,000 and \$116,000. These figures are adjusted for cost of living at the state level.

Utah DWS Star Rating System

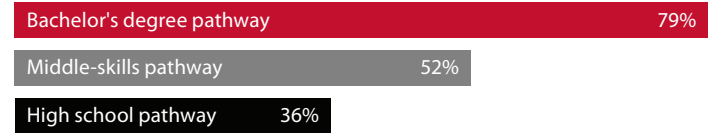
DWS assigns a star rating (1 to 5) to occupations based on employment outlook, job stability, and wages:

- ★★★★★ – strongest employment outlook, high employment stability, and high wages.
- ★★★★☆ – good employment outlook, generally high employment stability, and relatively high wages.
- ★★★☆☆ – moderate to strong employment outlook, employment stability, and a variety of wage levels.
- ★★☆☆☆ – either a relatively good employment outlook (in terms of growth and low turnover) with lower-than-average wages or a relatively limited employment outlook with higher-than-average wages.
- ★☆☆☆☆ – relatively low wages and limited employment outlook and stability.

This analysis focuses on 4- and 5-star jobs as “good jobs.”

Source: Georgetown Center for Education and the Workforce and Utah Department of Workforce Services

Figure 3: U.S. Projected Share of Good Jobs within Each Educational Pathway, 2031



Note: The middle-skills pathway includes education beyond high school but less than a bachelor's degree such as certificates, associate degrees, or some college.

Source: Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce

The likelihood of securing a good job increases with education. About 80% of the jobs on the bachelor's degree pathway are projected to meet the good job threshold, compared to 52% of middle-skill jobs, and only 36% of those requiring a high school diploma or less (Figure 3). While the Georgetown CEW projects that the overall share of jobs requiring postsecondary education will remain steady in Utah, the jobs offering higher wages and upward mobility increasingly favor those with education beyond high school.

At the state level, the Utah Department of Workforce Services (DWS) projects job openings by occupation. The department assigns star ratings (one to five) to occupations based on wages, growth, and stability. Most jobs rated 4- or 5-stars require postsecondary education. More than half (54.6%) of these 4- and 5-star jobs require at least a bachelor's degree, while 30.6% are accessible to those with a high school diploma or less. In contrast, 83.6% of 1-, 2-, and 3-star jobs require no more than a high school education (Figure 4).¹

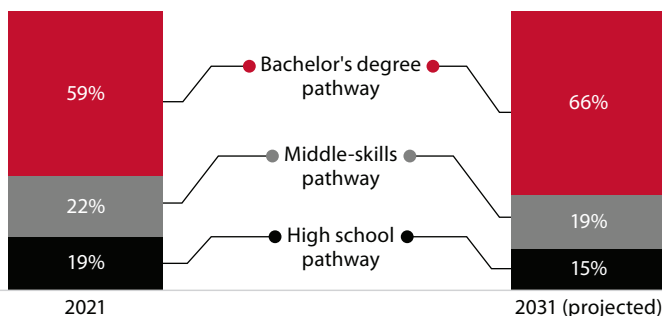
Many of the 4- and 5-star jobs tied to lower educational attainment likely require significant years of experience instead. For example, managers in food service, personal services, and agriculture are considered 4- or 5-star jobs that require a high school diploma or less. However, these jobs may require spending significant time in 1-, 2-, or 3-star jobs before securing a managerial position. It is also important to note that DWS measures the minimum education level needed for particular occupations. Some employers may require higher educational attainment than others within the same occupation.

Job Projections by Industry

Job growth projections from 2021 to 2031 vary across occupational categories. The fastest-growing sectors include food and personal services, community services and arts, health care, and STEM (Figure 5). Educational attainment requirements also differ across occupations. Sectors such as construction, production, and transportation (grouped under what Georgetown refers to as “blue-collar” occupations) and food and personal services generally require less postsecondary education when compared to fields like education and STEM (Table 1).

While overall job growth helps illustrate where employment opportunities will expand, identifying where the highest-quality jobs are expected to grow provides deeper insight for

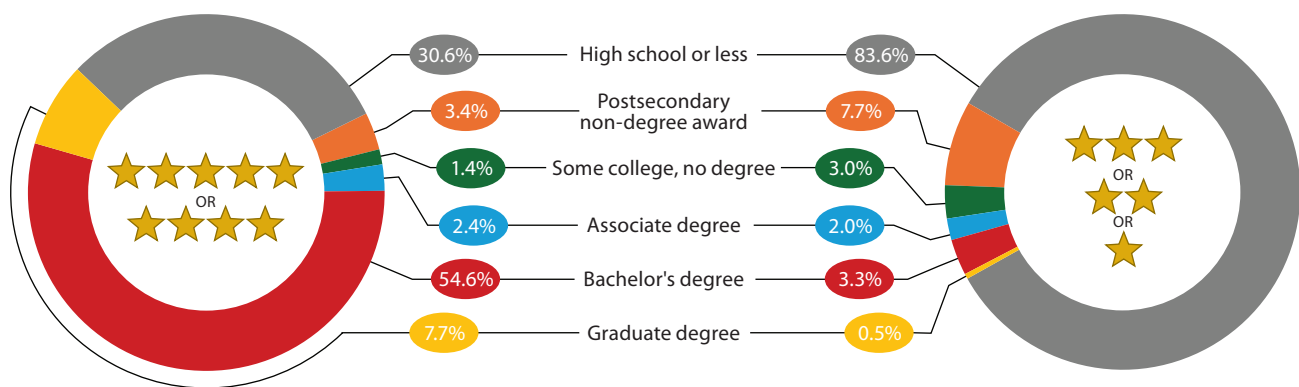
Figure 2: U.S. Projected Distribution of “Good Jobs” by Educational Pathway, 2021 and 2031



Note: The middle-skills pathway includes education beyond high school but less than a bachelor's degree such as certificates, associate degrees, or some college.

Source: Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce

Figure 4: Projected Required Educational Attainment for Utah Jobs by DWS Star Rating, 2032



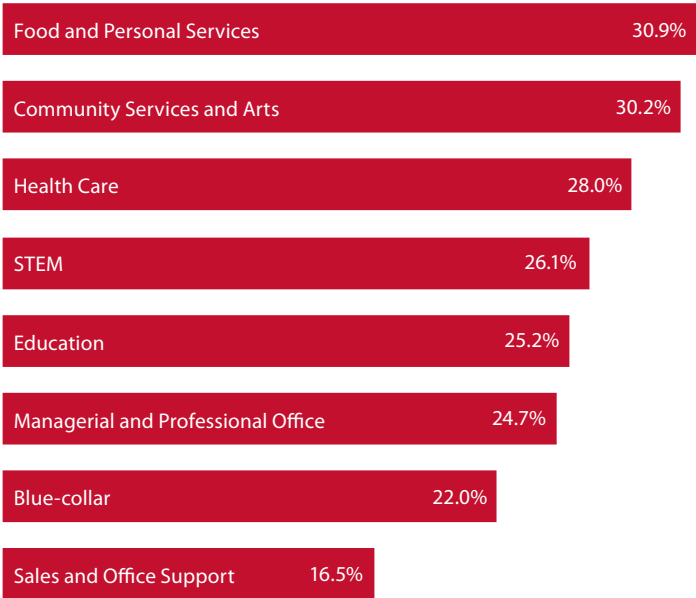
Note: Educational attainment shows the minimum educational attainment required for entry to the occupation, some positions within the occupation may require higher educational attainment.
Source: Utah Department of Workforce Services

Table 1: Share of Projected Utah Jobs by Educational Level and Occupational Category, 2031

Occupational Category	High School or Less	Post-secondary	Detailed Educational Attainment Categories					
			Less than high school	High school graduate	Some college	Associate degree	Bachelor's degree	Graduate degree
Education	5.9%	94.1%	0.7%	5.2%	14.1%	6.7%	46.7%	26.7%
STEM	9.2%	90.8%	1.7%	7.5%	19.2%	9.2%	45.8%	16.7%
Community Services and Arts	11.8%	88.2%	1.5%	10.3%	13.2%	7.4%	44.1%	23.5%
Health Care	13.6%	86.4%	2.4%	11.2%	23.7%	18.3%	23.7%	20.7%
Managerial and Professional Office	13.8%	86.2%	1.3%	12.4%	24.4%	8.0%	37.3%	16.4%
Sales and Office Support	29.1%	70.9%	3.4%	25.7%	31.8%	11.9%	22.7%	4.5%
Food and Personal Services	45.5%	54.5%	16.0%	29.5%	26.4%	9.4%	16.7%	2.1%
Blue-Collar	51.2%	48.8%	12.8%	38.3%	28.5%	9.2%	9.6%	1.5%
Total	29.3%	70.7%	6.7%	22.7%	25.4%	10.2%	24.9%	10.3%

Note: "Blue-collar" includes transportation and material moving, production, construction and extraction, installation, maintenance and repair, and farming, fishing and forestry occupations. Life and physical sciences, social sciences, financial and legal occupations, and farming, fishing, and forestry were excluded from their respective categories (STEM, managerial/professional, and blue-collar) due to data limitations.
Source: Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce

Figure 5: Projected Utah Job Growth by Occupation, 2021-2031



Note: "Blue-collar" includes transportation and material moving, production, construction and extraction, installation, maintenance and repair, and farming, fishing, and forestry occupations.
Source: Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce

Figure 6: Projected Utah Average Annual Growth for 4- and 5-Star Utah Jobs by Occupational Category, 2022-2032



Note: Average annual job openings for 4- and 5-star occupations in Utah from 2021 to 2031, aggregated by 2-digit Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) codes.
Source: Utah Department of Workforce Services

workforce and education planning. DWS projects that management, business and financial operations, and construction and extraction are expected to see the largest growth in 4- and 5-star jobs—those with strong wages, stability, and long-term outlooks. Other high-growth areas include computer and mathematical occupations, sales and related occupations, and health care practitioner and technical roles. Each of these categories is projected to add more than 5,000 jobs annually in Utah from 2022 to 2032 (Figure 6).

Postsecondary Completions and Workforce Supply

Understanding the education levels required for Utah’s future jobs also involves examining how well current postsecondary completions align with projected workforce demands. Reviewing current educational attainment rates and credential patterns can help identify where Utah is meeting these needs and where opportunities remain to strengthen the state’s talent pipeline.

Educational Attainment

Utah ranks third nationally for postsecondary educational attainment with 61.7% of working-age adults (ages 25 to 64) holding a postsecondary certification, certificate, or degree (Figure 7). Utah matches or exceeds the national average across all educational attainment types and the percentage of the population with a certificate is more than double the national average (8% vs. 4%) (Figure 8). These figures do not include individuals with some college but no degree, suggesting an even greater share of Utahns have some level of postsecondary experience.

Credentials

Utah institutions awarded more than 70,000 degrees and certificates in the 2022-23 school year. Liberal Arts and Sciences led with more than 13,000 credentials—primarily certificates and associate degrees, many of which serve as a starting point for further education. Health Professions and Business followed with approximately 12,000 and 8,000 awards, respectively (Figure 9). While these data offer a broad view of student interest, they do not easily map to specific jobs. Many programs prepare students for a range of careers, and credentials often

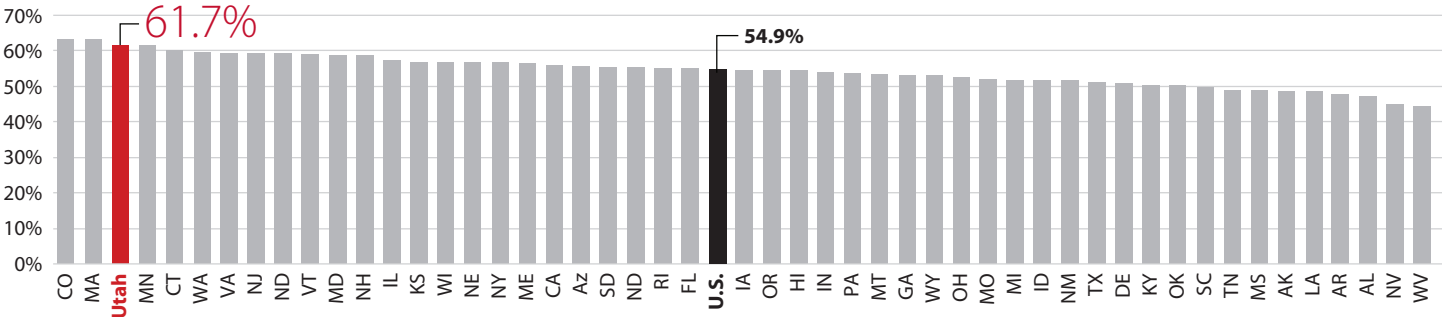
Technical vs. Durable Skills

Education that blends technical skills with widely applicable “durable skills”—such as communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving—offers the strongest foundation for long-term success. While durable skills may not yield immediate wage gains, research shows they increase adaptability and career resilience, especially as workers shift roles or respond to new technologies. These skills remain in high demand across industries, regardless of program or credential type. General education courses typically included in broader degree programs can help develop these transferable skills, supporting long-term success across occupations.²

As innovations like artificial intelligence reshape job requirements, post-secondary institutions play a critical role in preparing students to be able to adapt to changing job environments. Increasing educational attainment and ensuring transferable skills are embedded across award types can strengthen Utah’s workforce and boost individual opportunity. Utah employers consistently express interest in partnering with education providers to improve training in both technical and durable skills. They report that while many graduates demonstrate strong technical preparation, critical gaps remain in communication, teamwork, and time management. Employers also recommend greater use of micro-credentials, work-based learning, and industry-aligned certificates to enhance flexibility and ensure that credentials remain relevant in a changing economy.³ As the labor market shifts, new occupations emerge and necessary skills evolve, making it important for postsecondary education to adapt to meet these changing needs.

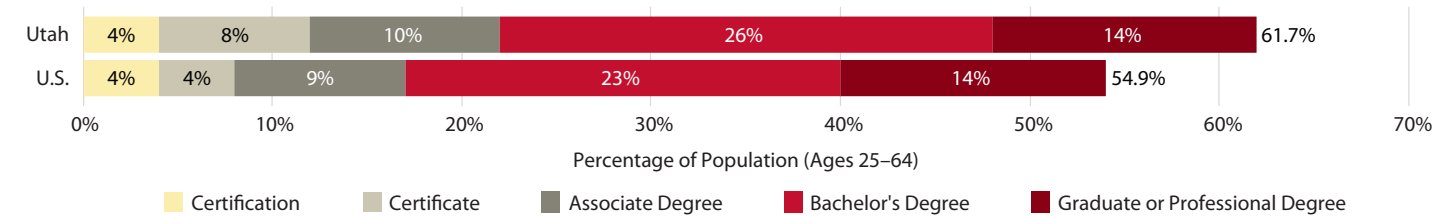
serve as an educational foundation rather than a direct pipeline to a single occupation. Many graduates may also work in unrelated fields, relocate out-of-state, or delay entry to the labor force.

Figure 7: Postsecondary Educational Attainment by State, 2023
Percentage of Population Ages 25-64 with a Postsecondary Certification, Certificate, or Degree



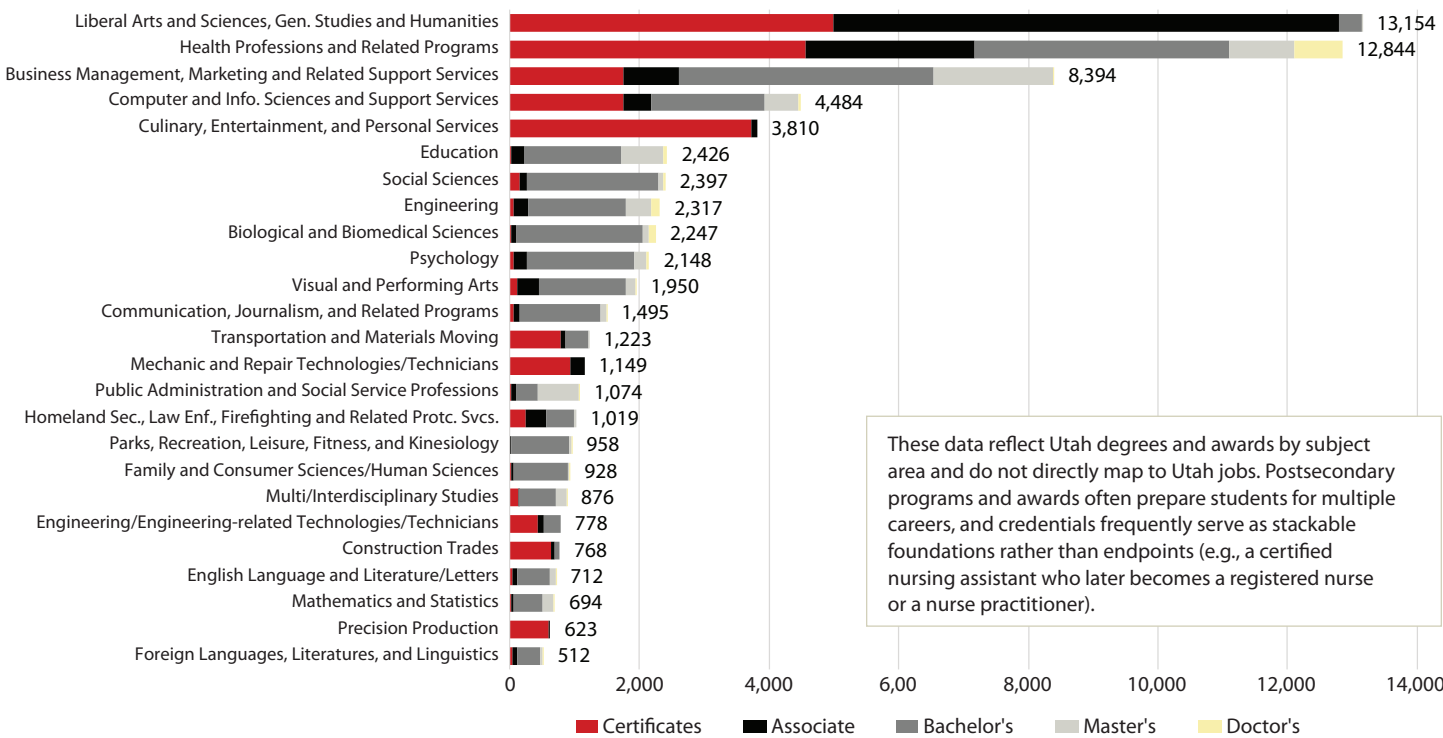
Note: United States total includes the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, but rankings only include states.
Source: Lumina Foundation

Figure 8: Educational Attainment by Type of Credential or Degree, 2023



Note: Degrees include associate, bachelor's, and graduate or professional degrees. Short-term credentials include college-level certificates and industry-recognized certifications that meet high-value criteria in terms of employment, pay, and learning.
Source: Lumina Foundation

Figure 9: Utah Degrees and Awards by Subject Area, 2022-23



Note: Includes the top 25 2-digit CIP codes with more than 500 awards from all Utah institutions reporting to IPEDS, excluding Western Governors University (WGU). Although WGU awarded 23,973 bachelor's and 22,141 master's degrees in 2022–23, only 5.8% of its students reside in Utah.
Source: National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)

Workforce Alignment

To assess alignment between postsecondary education and workforce needs, the Utah System of Higher Education (USHE) and DWS measure “high-yield” awards, or educational programs linked to 4- and 5-star occupations. In the 2023–24 school year, 72.2% of all USHE awards were considered high-yield. Research universities awarded the highest share of these awards (81.5%), followed by regional universities (74.7%), community colleges (72.0%), and technical colleges (52.5%) (Figure 10). USHE institutions award about 75% of all degrees and certificates from Utah institutions.⁴

Anticipating Future Workforce Needs

Forecasting the education levels needed for future jobs poses inherent challenges. Many of tomorrow's occupations do not yet exist, and technological advances continue to reshape the labor market's required skills. While projections based on

current trends provide a useful planning tool, they cannot fully account for emerging industries or innovations that may shift workforce demand. As noted by the World Economic Forum, employers expect 39% of workers' core skills to change by 2030, and roles in areas such as artificial intelligence, green energy, and advanced manufacturing are likely to rapidly expand.⁵ This uncertainty makes it difficult to specify exactly which credentials will be needed—but the importance of higher education remains clear.

Higher levels of educational attainment have consistently yielded benefits for individuals and society, even amid shifting job requirements. Postsecondary education tends to increase earnings, reduce unemployment risk, and enhance upward mobility. A more educated workforce can help catalyze innovation and entrepreneurship, generating new industries and higher-skill jobs that did not previously exist. Increasing

educational attainment not only helps individuals adapt to a changing economy—it also helps shape that economy, expanding opportunity and raising the baseline for job quality.

Strong connections between higher education and industry can help mitigate the uncertainty of long-term job projections. Ongoing collaboration ensures that institutions receive timely feedback about emerging skill needs, allowing them to adapt programs, develop new credentials, and align curricula with real-time labor market demand. Tools like job postings data, employer advisory boards, and work-based learning partnerships provide critical insights into evolving workforce expectations—helping higher education remain responsive and relevant in a changing economy.

Educational Attainment Gaps and Labor Force Potential

Utah’s high educational attainment rates and strong production of high-yield credentials benefit the state’s future workforce. However, attainment rates differ across demographic groups. Persistent gaps by income, sex, and race/ethnicity reduce the state’s workforce potential. Addressing these differences can help expand individual opportunity while meeting future labor market needs.

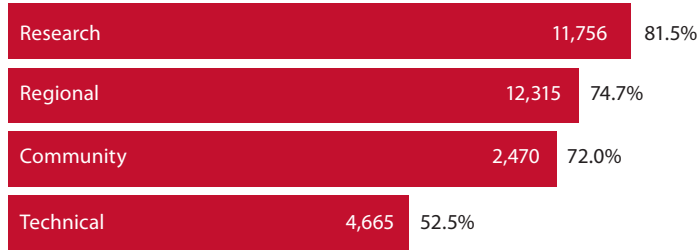
Educational Attainment Gaps

Closing educational attainment gaps would help increase the availability of skilled labor in Utah. Educational attainment varies substantially by student background, influencing both individual opportunity and the state’s long-term workforce capacity. Gaps in high school graduation, postsecondary enrollment, and credential completion limit the pool of skilled workers and contribute to persistent inequality. Analysis of Utah high school seniors from 2012–2020, linked to higher education records, shows consistent differences by income, sex, and race/ethnicity. (Figures 11-13). These differences widen along the education pipeline, with the largest gaps appearing in postsecondary completion, followed by enrollment, and then high school graduation.

To illustrate these differences, this analysis compares outcomes for economically disadvantaged, male, and Hispanic/Latino students to their respective peers (students not classified as economically disadvantaged, female, and White students). Hispanic/Latino students are Utah’s largest minority group, making them a meaningful reference point for comparison. In each case, the group with higher average educational attainment serves as the benchmark to highlight where gaps exist and how closing them could strengthen Utah’s workforce.

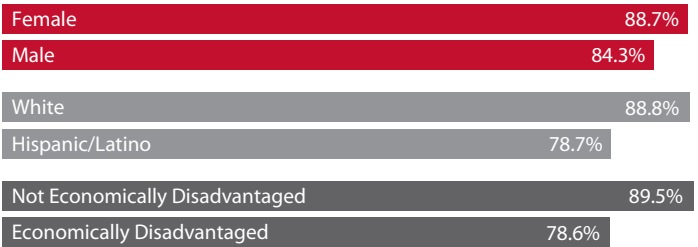
Results show economically disadvantaged, male, and Hispanic/Latino students trail their peers in high school graduation, college enrollment, and postsecondary credential completion. These patterns limit long-term economic mobility for these individuals and reduce the supply of skilled labor in Utah’s workforce.

Figure 10: Utah System of Higher Education High-yield Awards by Institution Type, 2023-24



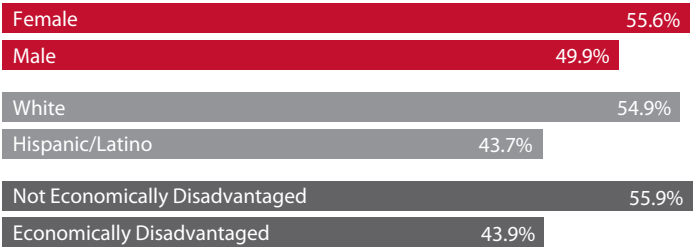
Note: High-yield awards are awards that map to high-wage/high-demand jobs as defined by DWS 4- and 5-star jobs.
Source: Utah System of Higher Education

Figure 11: High School Graduation Rates by Student Group Cohorts 2012-2020



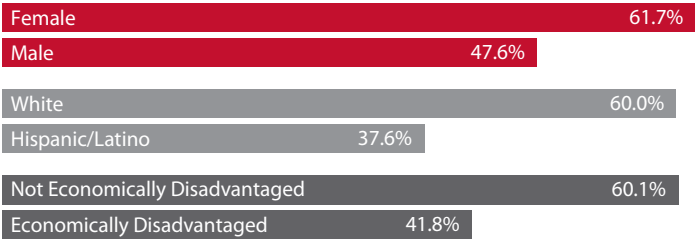
Note: Average graduation rates for Utah public high school seniors based on cohorts from 2012 through 2020.
Source: Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute analysis of Utah Data Research Center data

Figure 12: College Enrollment Rates by Student Group Cohorts 2012-2017



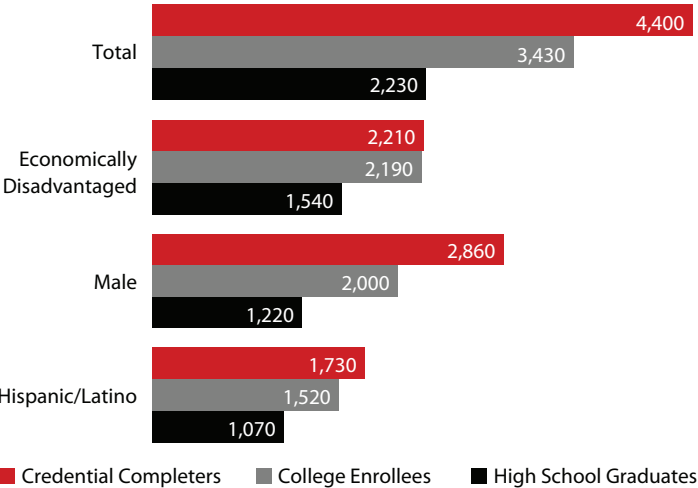
Note: Average college enrollment rates within three years of high school graduation for Utah public school cohorts from 2012 to 2017.
Source: Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute analysis of Utah Data Research Center data

Figure 13: Postsecondary Credential Completion by Student Group, 2012-2014 Cohorts



Note: Average postsecondary credential completion within six years of initial college enrollment for Utah high school graduates in the 2012 to 2014 cohorts.
Source: Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute analysis of Utah Data Research Center data

Figure 14. Estimated Additional Educational Attainment in Utah if Gaps Closed by Income, Sex, and Race/Ethnicity
2024 Cohort



Note: Estimates based on average outcomes (2012–2020) for high school graduation, college enrollment, and credential completion by student group applied to the 2024 cohort size. Values represent additional graduates if each group matched the higher-performing group in their category.
Source: Kem C. Gardner Policy analysis of Utah Data Research Center data

The Estimated Impact of Closing Gaps

Closing educational attainment gaps would yield a measurable increase in skilled graduates. For Utah’s 2024 high school cohort alone, eliminating disparities by income, gender, and race/ethnicity would result in an estimated:

- 1,540 additional high school graduates, 2,190 more college enrollees, and 2,210 additional credential earners among economically disadvantaged students.
- 1,220 more high school graduates, 2,000 more enrollees, and 2,860 additional credential earners by closing gender gaps.
- 1,070 more graduates, 1,520 more enrollees, and 1,730 more credential earners by closing gaps between Hispanic/Latino and White students (Figure 14).

Taken together, these changes would yield 4,400 more postsecondary credential earners in a single graduating class. While these gains represent just one cohort, closing these gaps consistently over time would result in tens of thousands of additional skilled workers—strengthening Utah’s workforce and expanding opportunity for future generations.

Methodology for Estimating Additional Graduates

This analysis estimates the potential increase in Utah’s high school graduates, college enrollees, and postsecondary credential earners if existing gaps by income, sex, and race/ethnicity were eliminated. The analysis uses student-level data from the Utah Data Research Center (UDRC), which links high school seniors from 2012 to 2020 to their postsecondary enrollment and completion outcomes. The dataset analyzes students by free or reduced-price lunch status (as a proxy for economic disadvantage), sex, and race/ethnicity.

Postsecondary enrollment and completion outcomes include only students who attended Utah System of Higher Education (USHE) institutions. They do not capture students who enrolled in private institutions within Utah or those who pursued postsecondary education out of state. As such, these estimates likely undercount the full number of college enrollees and completers in each cohort but provide consistent comparisons across groups.

For each step in the education pathway (high school graduation, college enrollment within three years, and postsecondary credential completion within six years of enrollment), the analysis calculates average rates from 2012 to 2020 for the following subgroups:

- Economically disadvantaged students vs. non-disadvantaged students
- Male students vs. female students
- Hispanic/Latino students vs. White students

The analysis applies the observed gap between the different subgroups to the size of the Utah class of 2024 public school cohort. The benchmark rates (i.e., those of the higher-attaining group in each comparison) were applied to the lower-attaining group to estimate the number of additional students who would graduate, enroll, or complete a credential if they experienced the same rates of attainment.

Limitations

These estimates are based on 2012-2020 cohorts applied to a single cohort and assume that all other factors remain constant. They reflect a one-year snapshot and provide a conservative view of the potential cumulative impact if such gaps were closed permanently or had been addressed in earlier cohorts. UDRC data includes only Utah public postsecondary institutions and does not capture students enrolling or completing postsecondary education out-of-state or at in-state private institutions. Figures are rounded and presented as illustrative estimates.

Utah Data Research Center Disclaimer

Some of the data for this research was accessible through Utah’s state longitudinal data system database administered by the Utah Data Research Center, which includes data supplied by UDRC members. This research, including the methods, results, and conclusions neither necessarily reflect the views of, nor are endorsed by, the UDRC members. All errors are the responsibility of the author.

Table 2: Benefits of Postsecondary Education

Individual	Societal
• Increased earnings • Increased economic mobility • Better health outcomes • Reduced stress • Higher levels of reported happiness • Higher job satisfaction • More likely to receive employer-provided health insurance • More likely to do educational activities with their children	• Increased GDP • Decreased crime • Increased volunteering • Increased voter participation • Increased tax contributions • Lower unemployment rate • Reduced reliance on public assistance • Reduced health care costs • Decreased poverty rate • More engaged communities

Source: Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute based on literature review

Benefits of Increasing Educational Attainment

Raising Utah’s educational attainment, including closing gaps between student groups, can yield meaningful benefits for individuals, families, and communities. Research consistently links higher levels of education to improved outcomes across nearly every domain of life.⁶ Individuals with more education tend to earn higher wages, report better health, experience less stress, and express greater confidence in their future. They are also more likely to work in jobs with greater satisfaction, stability, and access to benefits such as health insurance and paid leave.

At a broader level, higher educational attainment is associated with stronger economies and more engaged communities. Regions with more educated residents tend to see greater economic output, lower poverty and unemployment rates, and

higher rates of civic participation. Increasing attainment in Utah has the potential to strengthen the workforce, improve household stability, and contribute to healthier, more connected communities (Table 2).

Conclusion

Most projected jobs—especially those considered “good jobs”—call for postsecondary education. Utah’s economy already benefits from a highly skilled workforce, with educational attainment rates above the national average and a strong share of credentials that align with high-demand, high-wage jobs. However, persistent gaps by income, gender, and race/ethnicity continue to limit opportunity for many Utahns and constrain the state’s full workforce potential.

Addressing these disparities, increasing postsecondary completion, and improving alignment between education and employment offers a path to expanding opportunity and sustaining economic momentum. Although projecting future workforce needs is challenging, especially as emerging industries reshape demand, higher educational attainment supports better wages, stronger employment outcomes, and greater economic mobility. A more educated population not only adapts to change more easily—it also helps drive innovation and job creation. By focusing on closing gaps and expanding educational opportunity, Utah can help shape a more resilient economy that benefits individuals, families, and communities statewide.

Endnotes

1. The Department of Workforce Services measures the minimum educational attainment level typically required for entry-level positions into each occupation. In practice, many roles, especially those offering advancement or specialization, require additional education or training. As such, this approach may understate the full importance of educational attainment in meeting labor market needs.
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4. Based on 2022-23 completions at Utah institutions measured in the National Center for Education Statistics Integrated Postsecondary Data System. Due to their online national enrollment, Western Governors University’s completions were adjusted based on their share of in-state students (5.8%).
5. World Economic Forum. (2025). Future of Jobs Report. https://reports.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Future_of_Jobs_Report_2025.pdf
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