

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

THE STATE OF 'GOOD JOBS' IN AMERICA

More than 30 million jobs that pay \$35,000-plus are open to noncollege graduates

By Lauren Weber
July 26, 2017

At a time when politicians and pundits decry the end of middle-class jobs, it may come as a surprise that there are 30 million jobs paying more than \$35,000 a year for U.S. workers without four-year college degrees.

Now for the bad news: there are 75 million U.S. workers without college diplomas, or 2.5 workers for every one of those good jobs, meaning that high-school grads have far lower odds of winning the career lottery than they did 25 years ago, according to a new report from Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce. Good jobs, as defined by the report's authors, pay more than \$35,000 a year, or more than \$45,000 for workers over the age of 45.

The number of good jobs for noncollege graduates rose to 30 million in 2015 from 27 million in 1991, but the labor market grew, too. By 2015, the share of all good jobs that went to noncollege graduates fell to 45 percent from 60 percent in 1991 – leaving 45 million workers in low-paying, sometimes part-time roles that don't offer a path to the middle class.

In the post-World War II era, jobs in manufacturing and production propelled millions of American workers into the middle class. Today, more middle-class jobs for nongraduates are in financial services and health care. A high-school diploma alone won't cut it for a lot of those jobs, however.

Among noncollege degree holders, only workers with an associate degree had better odds of finding a good job in 2015 than they did 1991, Georgetown found. High-school graduates and dropouts, and people with some college, are all faring worse now than before, the report says.

"There's an assumption that there are no good jobs available if you don't have a B.A.," says Anthony Carnevale, the Center's director.

There are still pathways to well-paying careers, but fewer jobs pay a living wage – at least \$17 an hour for a full-time job – or higher for noncollege graduates relative to the total labor market. A growing share of those jobs require some postsecondary training, he says.

"You need to be in a program that leads directly to those jobs," says Mr. Carnevale, such as community college or a certification course. "And you need to hold your institution accountable to being able to prepare you for a job."

Workers are getting the message. The number of career-focused certificates awarded by community colleges, in fields such as electronics engineering, emergency management and

video production, more than doubled between 2000 and 2014, according to the American Association of Community Colleges.

In 2015, Wyoming had the highest share of noncollege good jobs thanks to a boom in mining and other natural-resource industries, coupled with a low overall population. It was followed by New Jersey and Maryland, densely populated states with more diverse economies.

This fall, Georgetown, in concert with J.P. Morgan Chase & Co., will launch a Good Jobs Index that maps the states and occupations where people without college degrees can find economic opportunities that pay at least a living wage.

In 1991, 27 percent of good jobs open to noncollege workers were in manufacturing; by 2015, the proportion had fallen to 16 percent; that share may fall further as employers reduce labor costs through globalization and automation. The authors analyzed Census surveys from that period to draw their conclusions.

Despite the shifting composition of well-paying jobs for nongraduates, the division by gender has remained roughly steady over the same period. Women hold approximately 30 percent of those positions, and their lack of access to lower-skilled but solid jobs helps explain why they are more likely to go to college than men.

“It’s their only way up,” says Mr. Carnevale.