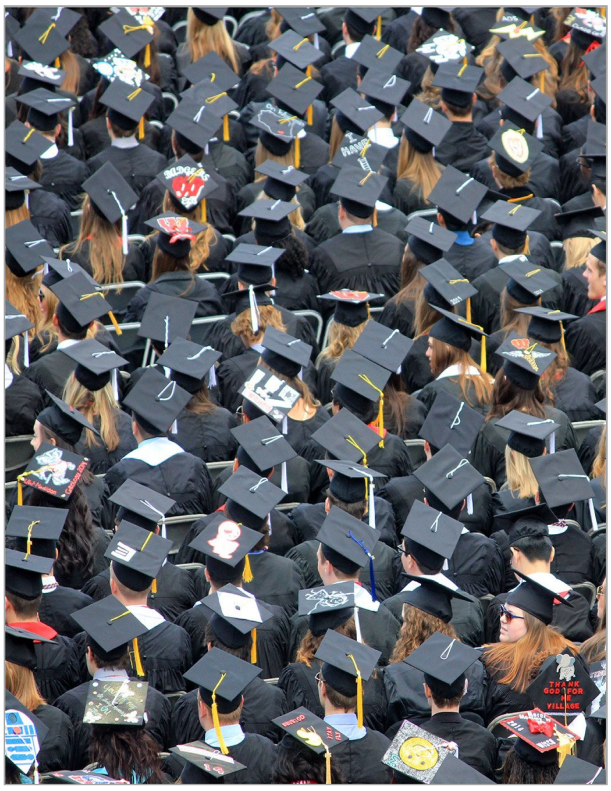
Center for an Urban Future
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Insight - July 2019

The Value of Non-Degree Credentials

CUF has previously urged CUNY to expand academic certificate programs as a way of helping more community college students get on the path to good-paying careers. A new national study bolsters the idea, finding that adults who earn certificates have higher lifetime earnings and employment levels than their peers with only a high school diploma.

by Rachel Wolfe

In New York City's knowledge-driven economy, some form of postsecondary credential is increasingly necessary just to earn a shot at a well-paying job. But for many New Yorkers from low-income households, the time and expense of earning a two- or four-year college degree proves prohibitive, contributing to alarmingly low completion rates at the city's public colleges.

One alternative to a typical bachelor's or associate's degree is an academic certificate. Offered in fields from cybersecurity and tourism management to IT networking and drone technology, these certificate and certification programs provide skills training in less time and at far less expense than traditional degrees.

But are these nontraditional credentials taken seriously by employers, and do they have value in the labor market? A new report by the Strada Education Network and Lumina Foundation says yes, demonstrating that these accessible, affordable short-term credentials make a real difference in increasing economic mobility.

The study, published in May, surveyed 50,000 working adults with no postsecondary education and found that sub-baccalaureate credentials spell good news for salary, employment levels, and career fulfillment. Adults with a certificate or certification make an average of $15,000 more than peers without a credential ($45,000 versus $30,000). Those with a sub-baccalaureate credential also have higher full-time employment rates (85 percent versus 78 percent), and are more likely to recommend their career path to others than are those with no credential.

Today, five percent of Americans between the ages of 25 and 64 report a high-quality postsecondary certificate as their highest credential. This new data on their outcomes highlights the difference these credentials can make in the lives of working adults, and reinforces the case for increased investment in academic certificates and industry-recognized

credentialing programs as a path to economic opportunity.

In an April 2018 commentary published by CUF, Kenneth Adams, dean of workforce and economic development at Bronx Community College, proposed that CUNY increase its efforts to develop new for-credit certificate programs in partnership with local employers. Our commentary showed that CUNY offers only 27 credit-bearing academic certificate programs to students, including several with no enrollment and few that provide robust connections to employers. The result is that few students are following this path: In 2015-2016, for example, we found that CUNY's community colleges awarded only 103 certificates out of 14,211 total credentials—fewer than 1 percent.

By affirming the value of non-degree credentials, the Strada/Lumina study helps strengthen the case for CUNY to expand its own certificate and certification program offerings as one important way of boosting economic mobility for more New Yorkers.

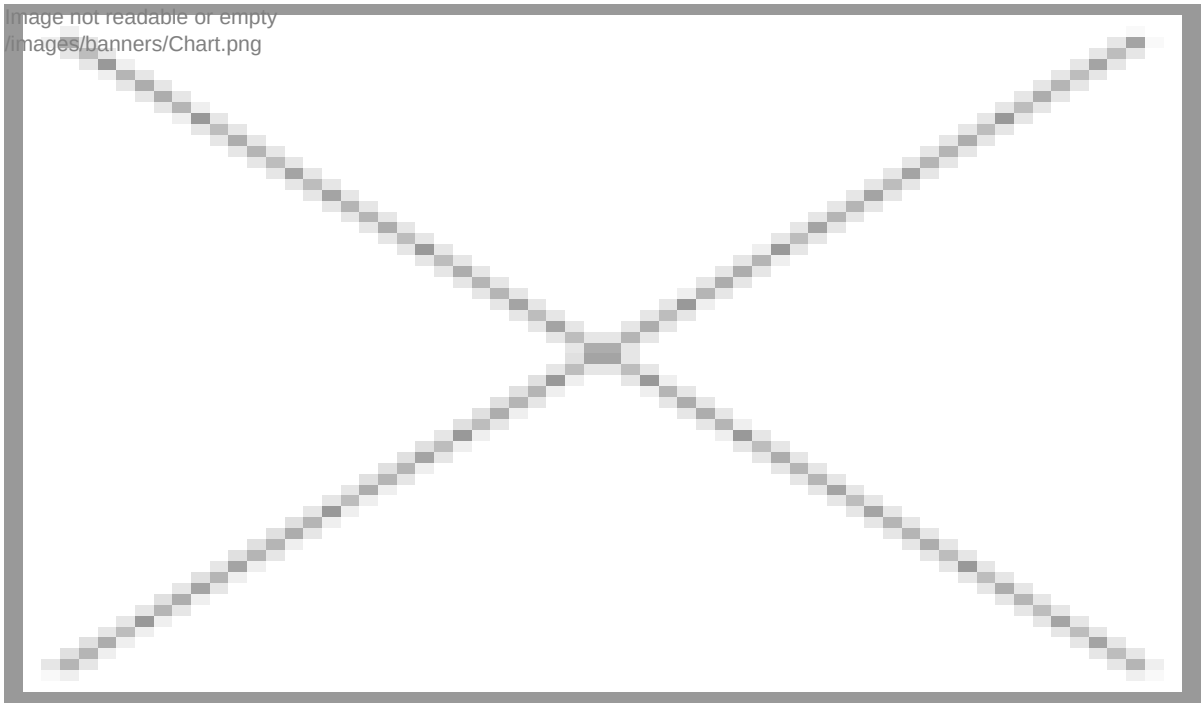


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Center for an Urban Future (CUF) is an independent, nonprofit think tank that generates innovative policies to create jobs, reduce inequality and help lower income New Yorkers climb into the middle class. For 22 years, CUF has published accessible, data-driven reports on ways to grow and diversify the economy and expand opportunity that are anchored in rigorous research, not preconceived notions about outcome. Our work has been a powerful catalyst for policy change in New York City and serves as an invaluable resource for government officials, community groups, nonprofit practitioners and business leaders as they advocate for and implement policies to address some of New York's biggest challenges and opportunities.



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