

Is College Worth the Cost?

By Zafar Khizer

On average, the answer is yes. People with bachelor's degrees still earn an average of about \$1.2 million more than high school graduates over a 40-year career. Unfortunately, this question should not be answered on average, but approached on a case-by-case basis. College isn't the default option anymore for a successful life, and just like any investment, it involves risk. It takes self-knowledge (What do you really want to achieve? A high paying job or a degree? Do you have the time and money for a four-year college that can take 6-8 years to complete on part-time basis?) and knowledge of the field (does your field require a college degree?) to determine if college is going to be worthwhile for you.

Only about 28 percent of jobs in this country require a four-year college degree (and that percentage isn't projected to increase much in the future.) A job in the IT field as a Programmer, Network Administrator, or Technical Support Specialist is not one of them.

The IT job market has two major categories:

1- Computer Programmers: These are professionals who write the code, program or software that runs on a computer to accomplish a task(s). This also includes web design and development. A computer cannot work without a program that includes operating systems such as Windows XP and applications such as Microsoft Word and QuickBooks. You are most likely to learn programming skills if you graduate from a college with a degree in computer science. As a matter of fact, you don't need a college degree to become a good programmer. You do need a high level of computer aptitude. Many of the top programmers don't have a college degree in computer science. (Note: Many people either cannot become good programmers even after earning a college degree in computer science or don't like to work as a programmer. Programming jobs have a higher probability to be out-sourced to countries such as India or China where programming talent is more economical than in US.)

2- Network Administration/Technical Support Specialist: These professionals install, manage, and provide technical support for computer systems such as Local Area Networks (LAN) using technologies such as Windows 2003. A typical college's computer science curriculum hardly teaches these skills. People who earn a college degree in computer science but don't want to work as a programmer have to retrain themselves to work as Network Administrator. (Note: As their physical presence is vital for most of these jobs, they are unlikely to be out-sourced.)

Most colleges that offer a degree in computer science usually offer too many unrelated courses for different areas of the computer field and do not properly prepare students to work in the field as a Network Administrator or Technical Support Specialist. Private technical schools such as PC AGE prepare students for only one area of the computer field, for example, offering courses

to become Microsoft and Cisco certified network engineers. With these skills, students will be better qualified to find work as a Network Administrator/Technical Support Specialist.

Considering the fact that the six-year graduation rate for students at four-year colleges in US is only 57% (and it is a six-year, not four-year, rate) a college degree may not be the best investment of time and money for a working adult or unemployed person who wants to change to a computer career, specifically if they want to work as a Network Administrator. Among all Scientific/Engineering professions, Computer Science may be the only field in which you can get a job (and go to very high level) without a college degree based on just your computer aptitude. It is a fact that most people working in the IT field as Network Administrators/Engineers and earning high salaries do not have a college degree in computer science. If you have the computer aptitude, about 12 months of training is all you need for a high paying IT career.

Do You Still Want a Degree Sometime in Your Life?

By focusing on industry certifications and creating an articulation agreement with Thomas Edison State College University (TESC, TESU), PC AGE offers a pathway to a career-focused, practical, hands on oriented applied and regionally accredited college degree tofor its students through TESC. Successful PC AGE graduates of the Internetwork Engineering program will be awarded 30 credits toward TESU's Associate of Applied Science (AAS) in Applied Computer Studies. TESU has one of the most flexible transfer credit policies in the country, so PC AGE graduates may also be able to apply credit earned at other regionally accredited colleges and universities toward this degree. We believe this may be the most practical Associate degree one can earn in the shortest time possible in the USA.

Again, you do not need a college degree to start a high paying IT career, but having this option to earn a degree any time in your life may not be a bad idea.

Zafar Khizer has a Master's degree in Computer and Information Science from New Jersey Institute of Technology. He is also the author of 17 computer books. Colleges and universities including New York University have used his books. Khizer founded PC AGE Career Institute, with locations in Edison and Jersey City, in 1991. He can be contacted at (201) 761-0144 x13 or zk@pcage.com.