

BACHELOR'S DEGREES

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Washington's employers need highly trained people ready for the jobs of today and tomorrow. Washington's community and technical colleges are stepping up to help students meet the demand, and bachelor's degrees are helping that happen.

Community and technical colleges across the state offer both bachelor's degrees and applied bachelor's degrees. Students enrolled in bachelor's degree programs in areas like computer science and nursing train for their four-year degree from day 1.

Students in applied bachelor's degree programs first earn an associate degree, which can be used to go to work right away, then start their four-year degree program to build on the skills learned during their associate degree-level work.

Bachelor's degree programs at Washington's community and technical colleges means more students can earn four-year degrees. This is especially important as we look to close equity gaps among low-income students, students of color and students who are place-bound who may not have the ability or resources to leave home to pursue a four-year degree.

In the 2020-2021 school year, 6,527 students were enrolled in bachelor's degree programs and courses at Washington community and technical colleges.¹ Bachelor's degree graduates are older than students in similar university programs: 68% of students are aged 25 or older. Forty-seven percent of students receive need-based aid, and 48% of students are students of color.²



Applied Bachelor's: Opening Doors for Professional-Technical Graduates

Washington's community and technical colleges believe every degree should lead to bigger and better things for students, whether it's a well-paying career, a job promotion or step toward a higher degree-level. This commitment, along with increased degree requirements in certain professions, is at the heart of our applied bachelor's degrees.

Building Upon an AA Degree

Applied bachelor's degrees fill skill gaps in practical, market-driven fields where job requirements have advanced beyond the associate degree level.

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Professional-technical (vocational) degrees — like radiation technology — are considered “terminal” degrees, designed to teach students what they need to enter the workforce ready for jobs. Students who want to continue their educations typically have to start over with brand new degrees. Applied bachelor’s degrees turn that traditional model around, giving students the opportunity to take their hard-earned professional-technical degrees to the next level and advance their careers.

The degrees vary from a two-year management track on top of a two-year technical education, or a continuation of a professional-technical degree. Students build upon their already valuable two-year degrees to land higher-paying jobs and promotions, while employers get the additional skill sets they seek in bachelor’s degrees.

As one college president put it, “Applied bachelor’s degrees turn skilled frontline workers into managers.”

Positive Outcomes

Applied bachelor’s degrees arguably offer hands-on training in a career embedded within a four-year degree. Employers seek graduates because they have technical expertise combined with communication, computation, critical thinking and people-management skills.

- In the first year after graduation, applied bachelor’s degree graduates had higher earnings than graduates of Washington’s regional public four-year universities who earned degrees in the same fields. Graduates of applied bachelor’s degree programs were also more likely to secure a job in their field.³
- 81% of applied bachelor’s degree graduates are employed within two years of graduating. Graduates who are employed full time have median annual earnings of \$62,000. Graduates in allied health fields have median annual earnings of more than \$70,000.⁴

Twenty-nine of our 34 community and technical colleges currently offer applied bachelor’s degrees in fields such as radiation and imaging sciences; cybersecurity; data analytics; and advanced manufacturing and materials technology. For the most recent list, visit www.SBCTC.edu and search for “applied bachelor’s degrees.”

Diverse Graduates

Most graduates of applied bachelor’s degree programs earned professional-technical degrees at community or technical colleges, which enroll more low-income students, students of color, and students who are the first in their families to go to college. Because of this, applied bachelor’s degree graduates are also more racially diverse than students in similar university programs.

Rigor Matching Demand

Applied bachelor’s degrees not only serve students, but also businesses who are looking to hire or promote diverse and skilled workers who have both specialized skills and the more generalized knowledge of a bachelor’s degree.

For colleges, getting approval to offer applied bachelor’s degrees is a rigorous process. It requires an extensive review of employer demand, approval from the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges and new accreditation as a baccalaureate-granting institution from the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities. The proposed degree must align with the college’s mission and fill a need unmet by other colleges in the region.

Doing What We do Best

Applied bachelor’s degrees build on the strengths of the community and technical college system and fill local skills gaps. As the workforce changes with lightning speed and job demands outpace employees’ credentials, applied baccalaureate degrees at community and technical colleges help Washingtonians build skills for career advancement.

Sources:

1. State Board for Community and Technical Colleges Academic Year Report dashboard.
2. University of Washington Community College Research Initiatives. (June 2020). Comparison of the Employment and Earnings Outcomes of Washington Community College Baccalaureate Graduates and University Grads.
3. State Board for Community and Technical Colleges dashboard: First-Time Entering Student Outcomes. Data provided by SBCTC research December 2020.