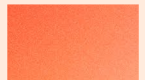
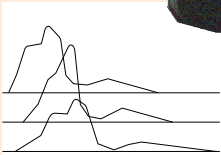
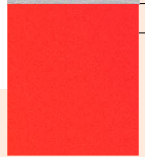
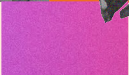
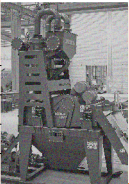


Moving Up and Moving Forward

Advancing Mobility for Adult Learners

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ABOUT LIGHTCAST

Lightcast, formerly Emsi Burning Glass, delivers job market analytics that empower employers, workers, and educators to make data-driven decisions. The company's artificial intelligence technology analyzes hundreds of millions of job postings and real-life career transitions to provide insight into labor market patterns. This real-time strategic intelligence offers crucial insights, such as what jobs are most in demand, the specific skills employers need, and the career directions that offer the highest potential for workers. Visit lightcast.io for more information.

AUTHORS

By Axelle Clochard, Tim Hatton, Julia Nitschke, Bledi Taska, and Rucha Vankudre

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Executive Summary

A rapidly evolving labor market requires workers to develop new skills to get ahead. At the same time, higher education institutions need to reverse decreasing enrollment trends.

Increasing enrollment among adult learners is a solution to both problems.

The latest data show that this is a good investment for both students and schools. Based on an analysis of over 125

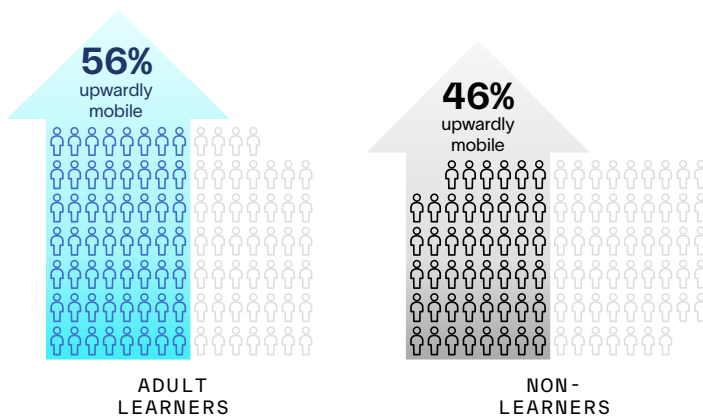
million social profile records, adults who return to higher education see a 140% larger increase in average annual salary than those who do not go back to school, and their upward mobility is 22% greater (56% vs 46%).

During a complex and disorienting time in the labor market, education provides a reliable and profitable return on investment—even for those already in the workforce.

However, fewer and fewer individuals are taking advantage of the opportunities education can provide. After the initial disruption of the pandemic, enrollments in spring 2022¹ were still down by 7.4% compared to spring 2020, a decrease of 1.3 million individuals. Over 400,000 of those potential students were adult learners.

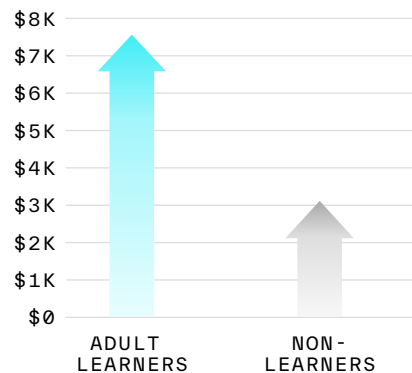
Change in Upward Mobility

Adults who return to higher education are 22% more likely to achieve upward mobility (56% vs 46%) over those who do not go back to school.



Change in Salary

Adults who return to higher education see a 140% larger increase in average annual salary than those who do not go back to school.



Source: Lightcast

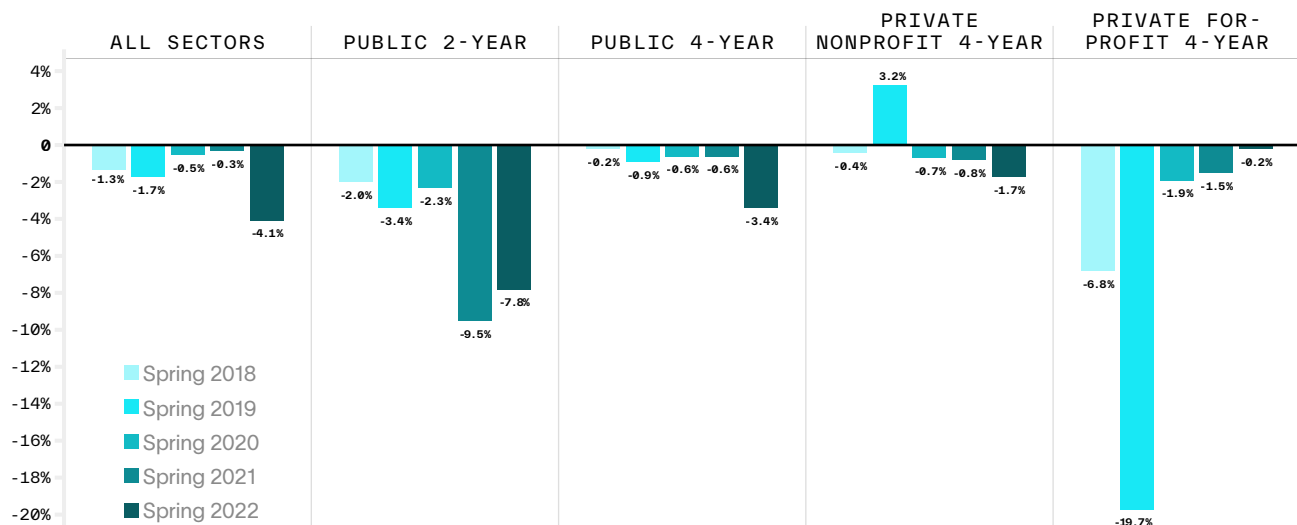
Bringing those students back, and even increasing their numbers, should be a high priority for higher education institutions for two reasons. First, the number of potential adult learners is much greater than the number of students coming out of high school each year. In 2021, there were around 96 million adults in the U.S. with a high school degree who did not complete higher education² in comparison to the 3.6 million who graduated high school.³ Second, our data and analysis show that adult learners are demonstrably better off after returning to school. Their prosperity creates a compounding effect that benefits not just the learner, but also their family, the community around them, their school, and the region at large.

The first step in that process is for higher education institutions to recognize and understand who adult learners are and how they can find the programs for which they are the best fit—which may include those that align with their career goals, have the greatest impact on potential future wages, reduce the risk of job displacement, or any number of other factors.

Since the community of adult learners is so diverse, it can be difficult to define. For this report, we used two criteria: an individual counted as an adult learner if (1) they had not previously completed a bachelor’s degree, and (2) they had at least seven years of work or educational experience before returning or enrolling for the first time in an associate’s or bachelor’s degree program.

% Change in Enrollment Over Prior Year by Institutional Sector

Total college enrollment fell to 16.2 million this spring—a one-year decline of 4.1% or 685,000 students.



Source: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, Lightcast analysis

Based on this definition, here are five key findings from the Lightcast research:

1

Adult learning pays off: the upward mobility of those who return to higher education is 22% greater than those who do not go back to school (56% vs 46%), and they also see a 140% larger increase in average annual salary.

2

Adult learners from public institutions have greater mobility gains than those in private or for-profit institutions. With the expansion of remote learning during the pandemic, public higher education institutions have the chance to become more competitive in recruiting adult learners.

3

Associate's degrees from certain technical fields, such as engineering and health, grant more upward mobility to adult learners than bachelor's degrees in more general fields like business or psychology.

4

Adult learners see gains in mobility across a wide range of industries. In some cases, mobility is even higher in fields like Manufacturing, Utilities, or Construction than in other industries traditionally thought of as upwardly mobile, like Information or Health Care.

5

In certain majors, the demographic groups that see the greatest likelihood of achieving upward mobility after returning to school are those who actually enroll in higher education less frequently than others—presenting a growth opportunity for those individuals but also an outreach opportunity for institutions.

INTRODUCTION

The Challenge Facing US Higher Education

Many industries have returned to some version of normal in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, but higher education is still in crisis. Between spring 2020 and spring 2022, post-secondary enrollment fell by 7.4%.⁴

This stands out among economic downturns. Typically, enrollment increases during recessions because competition for jobs is tight and many are out of work, meaning individuals have both the incentive and the time to improve their career prospects through education. After the 2008 financial crisis, for example, post-secondary enrollment increased by 1.9%.⁵

In the wake of Covid-19, however, the job market is uniquely strong for jobseekers. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the unemployment rate has hovered near its record low of 3.5% throughout late 2021 and early 2022, while the number of job openings hit a record high during the same period and has stayed near 11 million.

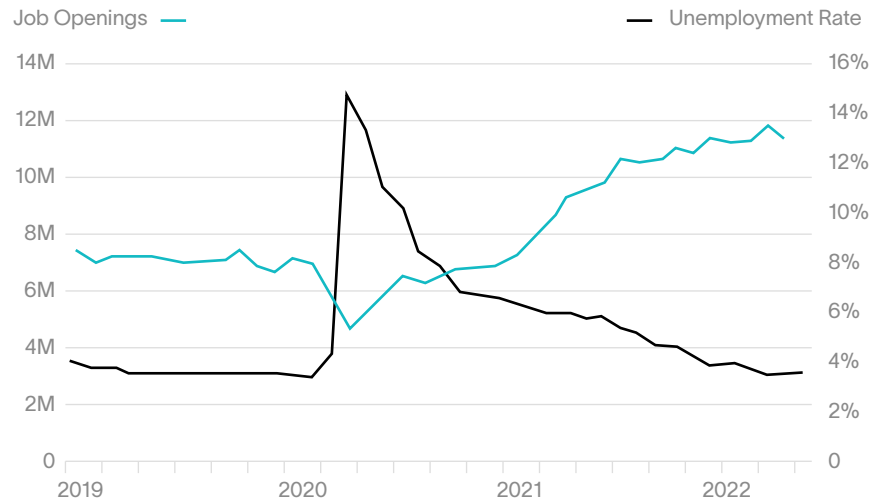
Like so much else about this pandemic, that dynamic is unprecedented in recent history, and it presents a new challenge for higher education institutions as they try to recover enrollments for the benefit of both their schools and their communities.

An increased focus on adult learners can provide a solution. In the spring of 2022, nearly 6 million students over the age of 24 were enrolled in post-secondary education, 36% of all students enrolled.⁶ Since adult-learning and continuing-education programs make up such a

significant portion of students, schools that continue to develop and expand those programs can benefit from increased enrollment but also see that benefit compounded through deeper connections with local employers and the greater community.

The first step in this process is understanding who adult learners are, particularly with respect to their demographics and skills. From there, institutions can assess which programs and skills can best facilitate adult learners' upward economic mobility.

Job Openings and Unemployment Rate Over Time



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics and Lightcast analysis

Methodology

Data

The analysis is based on a dataset of more than 125 million individual social profile records, updated quarterly. The data is provided by Cognism, a firm that collects and integrates information from partner databases, private feeds, and publicly available data. Each social profile contains information on the individual's self-reported employment and education history, which shows the length of time they were enrolled in a given program, although with a caveat that this data cannot definitively show whether an individual graduated from that program and that all data is self-reported. For analysis of profiles by demographic characteristics, we apply a Bayesian Improved Surname Geocoding (BISG)⁷ algorithm, which combines Census data on last names and geography information for the entire U.S. population to calculate the probability of race/ethnicity for profiles. Gender is predicted using an open-source Natural Language Processing model based on first names.⁸

Defining Adult Learners

270,000

Adult Learners in our sample



PERIOD 1

Some school and work
(less than B.A. and more
than 7 years total)



PERIOD 2

Education



PERIOD 3

Work

Within the social profiles database, we identified 270,000 adult learners. While definitions vary, we classify an adult learner here as someone who has met two conditions:

1. They have not previously completed a bachelor's degree, and
2. They have at least seven years of work or educational experience before returning or enrolling for the first time in an associate's or bachelor's degree program.⁹

In our sample, adult learners have an average of 14 years' work experience before returning to school, and they spend an average of three years in school as an adult learner.

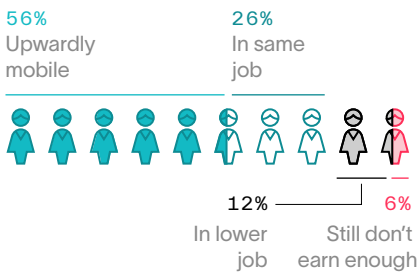
Defining Upward Mobility and Economic Success

To understand the impact of education on the career outcomes of adult learners, we first sorted their profile data into three time periods: the first is the period during which they are working before returning to school, the second is when they are in school, and the third is after their education is completed.

We used a worker's last job before enrolling in school as a baseline, and their highest-earning occupation in the five years after finishing school as a measure of their economic outcome. To determine their salary, we used the occupational salary estimates from the Occupational and Employment Wage Statistics released by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics. We chose the twenty-fifth percentile of those salaries because many of these workers will be entry-level in their new careers and less likely to earn the median salary in the first few years of their tenure.

In our analysis, an individual was considered upwardly mobile if the salary of their outcome

occupation was a) higher than that of their baseline occupation and b) greater than \$35,000 (i.e., a living wage). Using this definition, we found that adult learners earn an average of \$7,500 more in annual salary after returning to school and 56% are upwardly mobile. Of the 44% of adult learners who are not upwardly mobile, 26% are in the same job pre- and post-education,¹⁰ 12% move into jobs with lower salaries after education and 6% experience an increase in salary but still earn less than \$35,000.

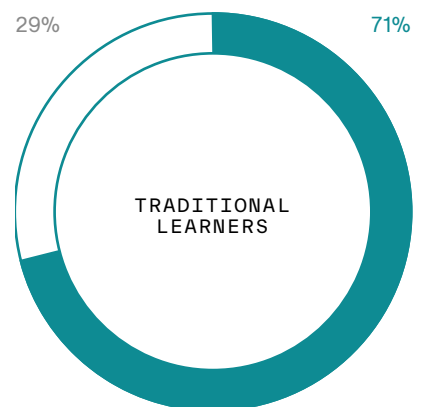
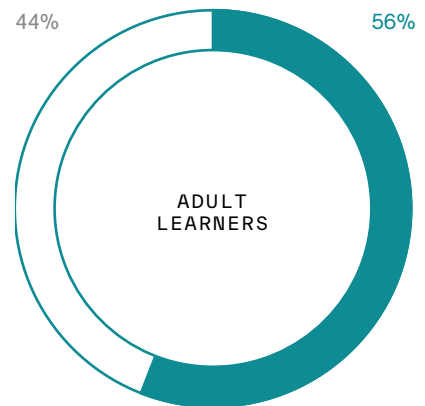
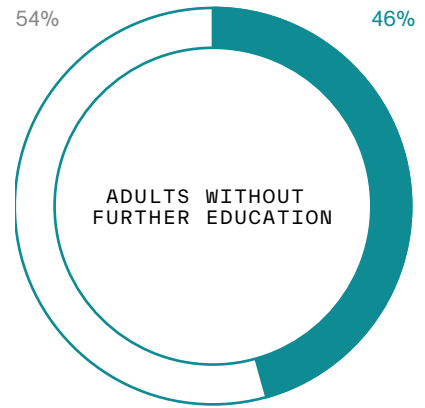


mobility and only earn an average increase of \$3,132 in annual salary over the average time period adult learners are in school. This implies that returning to school increases an individual's chances of experiencing upward mobility by approximately 22%.

Projecting similar conditions onto data from those who earn bachelor's degrees right out of high school, we estimate that traditional students' mobility is near 71%.¹¹ That rate can be used as a benchmark against which to compare adult learners' success. While adult learners' mobility rate, at 56%, still lags behind traditional students, a better understanding of adult learners themselves and the programs that are a good fit for them can help close the gap.

Upward Mobility for Learners

Not Upwardly Mobile Upwardly Mobile



Source: Lightcast

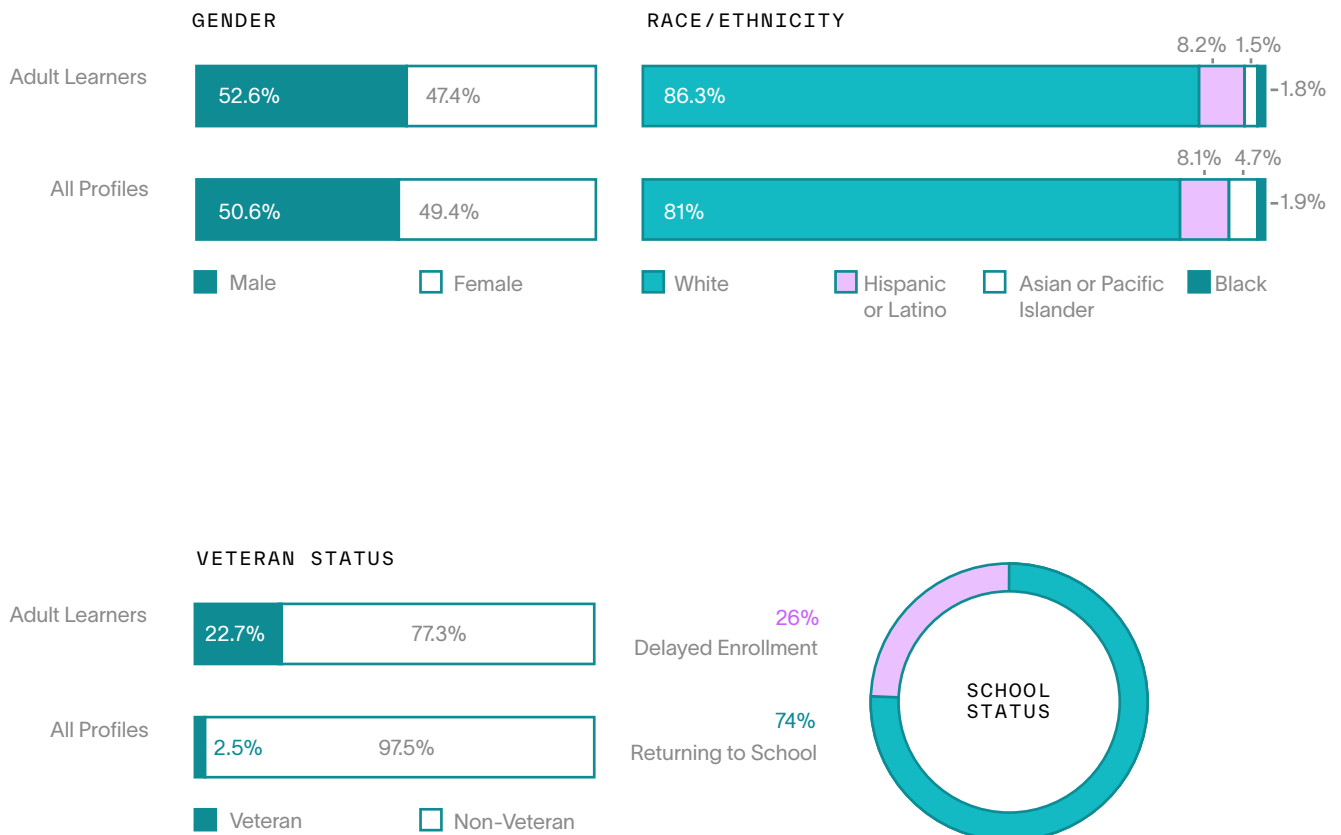
Because social profile data does not allow us to definitively tell whether an individual completed their degree or attended school without completion, it is likely that this estimate of 56% skews low. Even that low boundary shows significantly greater mobility when compared to individuals at similar points in their careers who did not go back to school; only 46% of those individuals experience

Results

Who are adult learners?

We found that adult learners are slightly more likely to be white and male compared with the general population. Social profiles for adult learners show a 53%/47% male-female percentage split, a touch above the 51%/49% percentage split for profiles overall. Over 86% of adult learners were white, compared to 81% of all profiles in our data (a sample that is itself more likely to be white than the general US population).

Adult learners are also far more likely to be veterans due to educational support from the federal government and other resources. In our sample, veterans made up 22.7% of adult learner profiles compared to just 2.5% of the overall population. Additionally, about 26% of adult learners had previously enrolled in associate's or bachelor's degree programs.

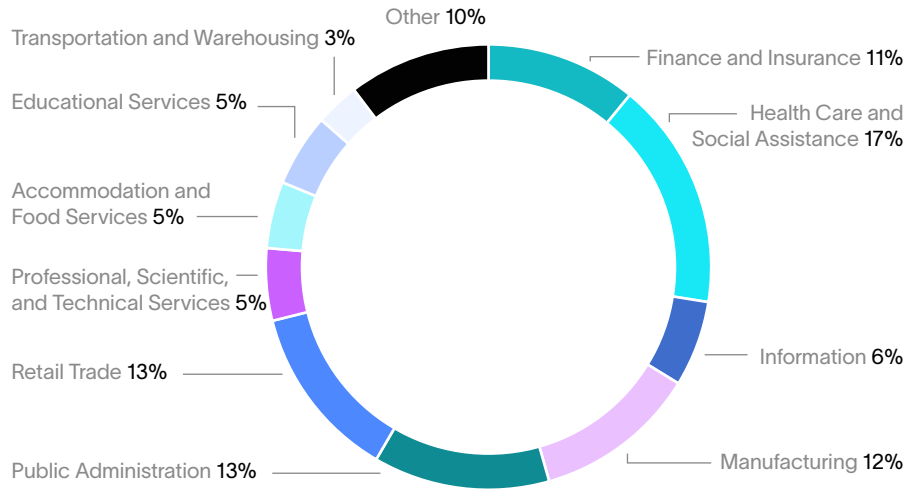


Source: Lightcast

Where do they come from?

Adult learners work in a variety of different industries before enrolling in education. The top five industries are Health Care and Social Assistance, Retail Trade, Public Administration, Manufacturing, and Finance and Insurance. Sixty-five percent of adult learners come from these five industries while the remaining 35% can be found across the 16 remaining industries including Educational Services, Transportation and Information among others.

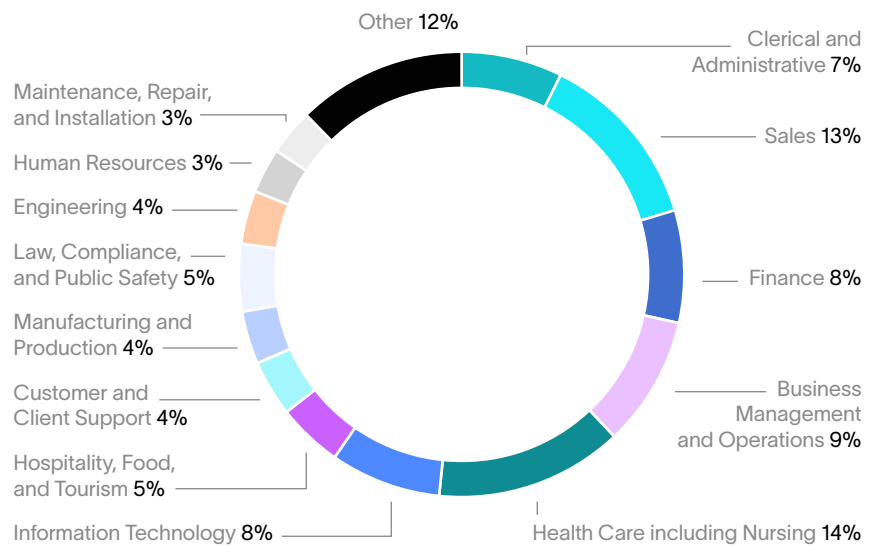
Pre-Education Occupation Families for Adult Learners



Source: Lightcast

In terms of occupation families, adult learners are most likely to come from the Sales and Health Care including Nursing occupations. Other top occupation families are Business Management and Operations, Information Technology, and Finance.

Pre-Education Industries for Adult Learners



Source: Lightcast

How Learning Happens: Institutions, Degrees, and Program Selection

The For-Profit/Public Divide

About one in five adult learners (22%) attend a for-profit postsecondary institution, compared to just 5% of traditional students, and adult learners are less likely to attend a public institution: 52% of all adult learners choose one, compared to 66% of traditional students.

This gap makes clear a growth opportunity for public higher education institutions without diminishing the benefit that for-profit schools have and continue to provide for adult learners.

Within our data, the top schools attended by adult learners were:

1. University of Phoenix (30,668 adult learners in our sample)
2. Western Governors University (5,357 adult learners in our sample)
3. DeVry University – Illinois (5,115 adult learners in our sample)
4. Ashford University (4,142 adult learners in our sample)¹²
5. Strayer University – Virginia (3,020 adult learners in our sample)

Four of those five are for-profit (with the exception of Western Governors University), and three (University of Phoenix, Western Governors, and Ashford) are online-only.

One likely explanation for the correlation between for-profit institutions and adult learners is that those schools often design and market their programs specifically towards adult learners, and they are more likely to provide support systems to help balance school with other obligations.. However, that support comes at a price: in 2020–2021, the average total cost of attending a four-year public institution for a student living off-campus with family was \$14,900, compared to \$23,900 at a private for-profit school or \$43,200 at a private non-profit school. This difference is even more stark when looking at two-year institutions, where the average total cost per year at a for-profit private school was over two times as large as a public community college: \$21,400 vs. \$9,900.¹³ Online programs also show similarly large differences in tuition between public and private schools.¹⁴

In our data, 54% of those who attended for-profit institutions were upwardly mobile, and 58% of those who attended public institutions gained ground. If public schools were to increase the number of adult learners attending their programs, it could prove advantageous for both those institutions and the students they serve.

The flexibility afforded by remote or asynchronous learning is a major factor in attracting adult learners, which is likely why so many for-profit institutions have had so much success.¹⁵ But since the Covid-19 pandemic spurred rapid growth in both online programs and the infrastructure to support remote

learning, more public and non-profit institutions (both four-year and two-year) now have the capability of reaching that same group of potential learners.

As public institutions seek to boost their enrollments, the adult learner population offers a new pool of students—one that for-profit schools currently have a much greater hold on—while for-profit schools will need to adapt to a changing educational landscape that levels the playing field with regard to online education. In learning how to do so, schools will first need to recognize and understand the programs adult learners currently pursue and which skills they will need in their future careers.

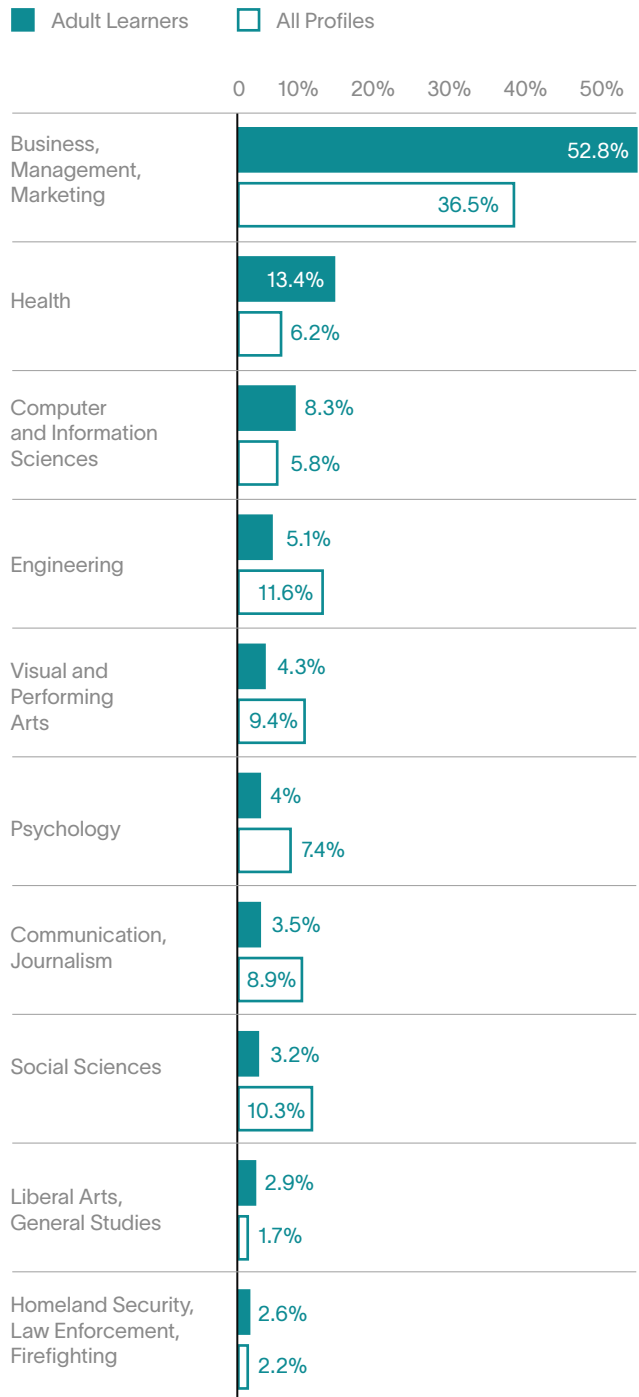
What do they study?

Two-thirds of adult learners pursue bachelor's degrees, while about 28% pursue associate's degrees and 6% go on to complete a master's degree or PhD. Among bachelor's and associate's degrees, the most popular field of study are programs related to business, management, and marketing, while health professions and related programs come in a distant second.

Relative to the general population, engineering is underrepresented in adult learners earning bachelor's degrees. Engineering is a high-earning field and one that has a consistently high number of job openings and it is the second most popular field of majors in the general population.

Engineering's lack of popularity among adult learners suggests a number of obstacles potential students face in getting into those programs. Those might include admissions

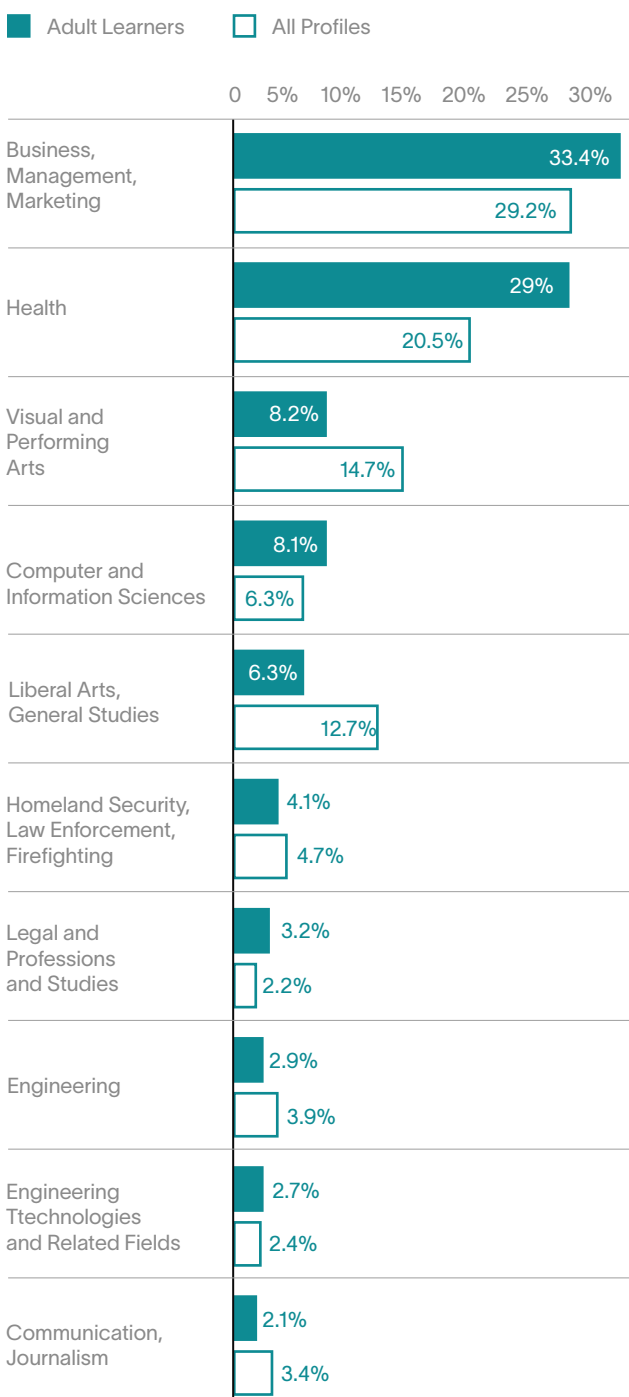
Top Majors of Adult Learners with Bachelor's Degrees



Source: Lightcast

requirements based on out-of-date high school credentials or the time and flexibility challenges facing adult learners across the board. Those factors aside, engineering is still a demanding

Top Majors of Adult Learners with Associate's Degrees



Source: Lightcast

field that won't appeal to every kind of student, but it would provide a natural fit for potential adult learners already working in adjacent technical fields. By addressing and mitigating the obstacles facing potential students in the field, institutions can ensure that students who might be interested have every chance to enroll in those programs, and by doing so, schools can increase the number of upwardly-mobile alumni they have in a stable, well-paying industry.

Adult learners pursuing associate's degrees are underrepresented in both fine arts and liberal arts, relative to all learners, and more likely to study a field related to health or business. This is possibly because adult learners are more focused on career outcomes than traditional-age college students—and it's certainly true that major and field play a vital role in students' mobility and economic success after attending school.

Many community colleges focus their recruiting and course offerings on associate's degrees designed to enable traditional learners to transfer easily to four-year institutions. However, past research from Lightcast (as Burning Glass Technologies) showed that many of those students never achieve the bachelor's degrees their community college programs were designed for, leaving those students stranded with skills and certifications that don't fully prepare them for the job market. While there are paths learners can take toward economic prosperity, an associate's degree in liberal arts or general studies on its own provides limited return on investment.¹⁶ This means that most of these colleges' resources are invested in students and programs whose path forward may not be reliable.

Measuring Success and Making it Happen

As adult learners return to school looking for new skills and experiences, they are also looking for insight into how their careers can best be aligned with the needs of the job market. And while potential students can and should have some grasp on the demands of their potential career fields, educators should have a thorough understanding about how the skills and classes they teach will apply to students' lives after graduation. Institutions need to do more than offer valuable programs—they should be able to guide students into the programs that have the most value.

With that in mind, here is what our data shows about mobility and economic success among adult learners:

By Degree And Major

As a general rule, those who graduated with bachelor's degrees saw greater mobility than those with associate's degrees, but there are a

few exceptions. Associate's degrees in Engineering Technologies or Engineering provide more mobility than most bachelor's degrees, and the same is true for associate's degrees in Health Professions

and Computer and Information Science. Associate's degrees in those fields are often career-oriented and provide a solid, reliable pathway to well-paying occupations such as a project manager or nurse.

| Most Upwardly Mobile Majors Across Degrees | % Upwardly Mobile | Average Salary Gain |
|---|-------------------|---------------------|
| Engineering | 72% | \$18,916 |
| Physical Sciences | 63% | \$12,006 |
| Engineering Technologies and Engineering-Related Fields | 63% | \$10,134 |
| Mathematics and Statistics | 62% | \$11,123 |
| Architecture and Related Services | 61% | \$8,961 |
| Computer and Information Sciences and Support Services | 61% | \$11,062 |

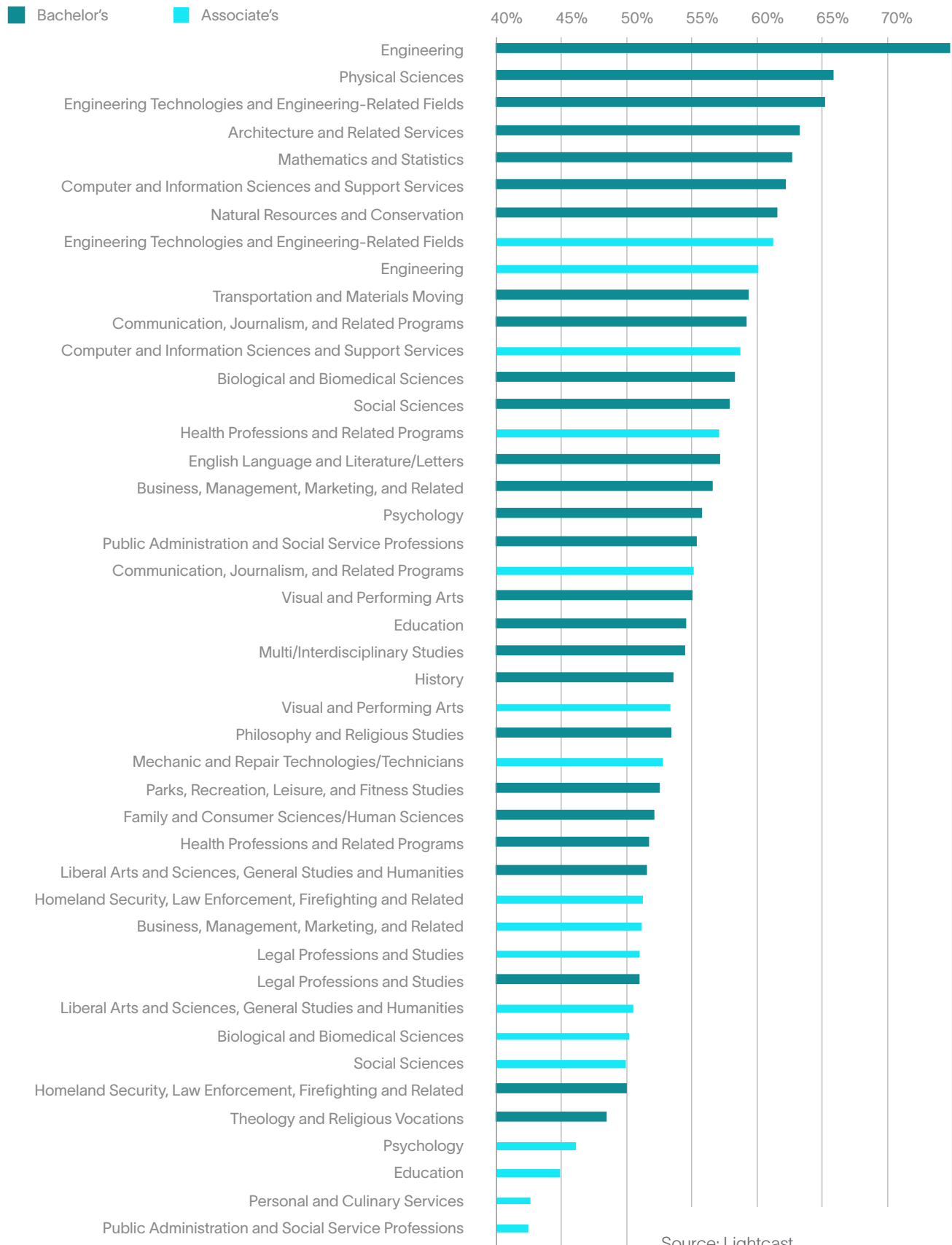
Source: Lightcast

| Least Upwardly Mobile Majors Across Degrees | % Upwardly Mobile | Average Salary Gain |
|--|-------------------|---------------------|
| Liberal Arts and Sciences, General Studies and Humanities | 51% | \$6,098 |
| Parks, Recreation, Leisure, and Fitness Studies | 51% | \$7,804 |
| Homeland Security, Law Enforcement, Firefighting and Related Protective Services | 51% | \$5,710 |
| Family and Consumer Sciences/Human Sciences | 49% | \$4,710 |
| Theology and Religious Vocations | 47% | \$1,823 |
| Personal and Culinary Services | 41% | -\$183 |

Source: Lightcast

Mobility Rates by Degree and Major

Associate's degrees from certain technical fields such as engineering and health grant more upward mobility to adult learners than bachelor's degrees in more general fields like business or psychology.



Source: Lightcast

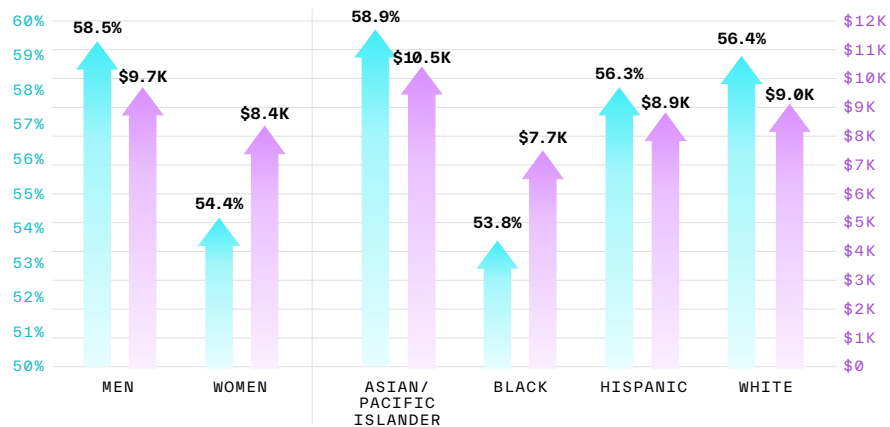
Enabling economic success and mobility is one of higher education's primary functions. In order for institutions to refine their internal decision-making about which programs they offer and skills they teach, and also advise students themselves, it is vital to

understand what programs enable prosperity most effectively.

The most salient predictor of mobility is the field of study and career that students pursue, but mobility is also affected by other factors such as demographics.

Upward Mobility and Salary Growth by Gender and Race/Ethnicity

All groups of adult learners saw a majority achieve upward mobility and an increase in salary, but men and Asian/Pacific Islanders saw the highest rates of upward mobility and greatest salary increases.



Source: Lightcast

Tapping into potential adult learners

Institutions aiming to increase adult-learner enrollment should be strategic about where they recruit and market their programs. If a group of workers is already successful and stable in a current field, then those workers will tend to be less interested in leaving those jobs to go back to school. Likewise, if workers from a certain occupation are less likely to prosper even after returning to school, they may not want to spend the time and money on education. Tables to the right show the industries whose workers see the greatest mobility after returning to school—regardless of whether they stay in that industry or move on to another.

Looking specifically at the type of origin occupations that tend to see income mobility, over 70% of adult learners coming from the Customer and Client Support occupation family, Maintenance, Repair and Installation occupation family, and Hospitality, Food

Upward Mobility and Average Annual Salary Gain for Adult Learners by Pre-Education Industry and Occupation Family

| Period 1 Industry | % Upwardly Mobile | Average Annual Salary Gain |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| Accommodation and Food Services | 62.6% | \$15,233 |
| Utilities | 62.5% | \$11,206 |
| Retail Trade | 62.2% | \$14,041 |
| Transportation and Warehousing | 61.7% | \$11,512 |
| Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation | 61.2% | \$14,766 |

| Period 1 Occupation Family | % Upwardly Mobile | Average Annual Salary Gain |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| Customer and Client Support | 73.2% | \$19,248 |
| Maintenance, Repair and Installation | 72.2% | \$16,364 |
| Hospitality, Food and Tourism | 71.1% | \$21,894 |
| Clerical and Administrative | 69.2% | \$16,960 |
| Manufacturing and Production | 68.2% | \$14,608 |

Source: Lightcast

and Tourism occupation family experience mobility after additional education and can earn around \$20,000 more in annual salary. Again,

this includes graduates who returned to their original source occupation family and those who found work in another field.

Demographic Differences in Upward Mobility

Male adult learners experience more mobility than female adult learners. While this is partially because they enroll in majors with higher mobility rates, even within the same major, men are more likely to move to a higher-paying occupation.

This is part of a larger pattern of gender disparity in underemployment (in which a worker is overqualified for their job). As past research from Lightcast (as Burning Glass Technologies) showed, nearly half of all female graduates, regardless of age, are underemployed in their first job following

graduation, compared to 37% for male graduates. This holds true even in STEM fields, which more often lead directly to well-paying jobs: women with math degrees are 32% likely to be underemployed in their first job and five years later, while male math majors are only 25% likely to be underemployed.¹⁷

While women continue to face a wide array of gender discrimination in the workplace, knowing these tendencies can help educators, mentors, and other advisors adapt for them, particularly when helping students gauge the potential outcome of different fields of study and how they relate to future careers.

| Major | Program Examples | Rank for Men | Rank for Women | % Upwardly Mobile for Men | % Upwardly Mobile for Women |
|----------------------------------|---|--------------|----------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Business | Business Administration, Marketing, Finance, Accounting | 1 | 1 | 56.7% | 54.6% |
| Computer and Information Science | Computer Science, Information Technology, Informatics | 2 | | 61.9% | 57.9% |
| Engineering | Mechanical Engineering, Civil Engineering, Computer Engineering, Electrical Engineering | 3 | | 72.5% | 69.6% |
| Health Professions | Registered Nursing, Health Care Administration, Public Health, Pharmacy | 4 | 2 | 60.2% | 53.6% |
| Visual and Performing Arts | Art Studies, Graphic Design, Interior Design | 5 | 3 | 56.4% | 52.7% |
| Psychology | General Psychology, Clinical Psychology, Industrial and Organizational Psychology | | 4 | 53.3% | 55.5% |
| Liberal Arts | General Liberal Arts and Sciences Studies, Humanities | | 5 | 52.3% | 50.2% |

Source: Lightcast

However, some specific data sets run contrary to these prevalent trends. For example, women are more likely to become upwardly mobile after studying in certain fields than men are, despite being outnumbered, and Hispanics also find much greater mobility in some majors than their non-Hispanic counterparts.

As they seek to find and enroll more adult learners, schools can point to these statistics to show how their programs can be used to create prosperity for a more diverse group of adult learners.

Finally, institutions can look to the industries that provide the most likely paths toward mobility and partner with local businesses in those industries to provide a smooth transition and a reliable career pathway for students that allow the broader community to thrive.

Industries who facilitate and support employees'

Upward Mobility and Average Salary Gain for Adult Learners by Post-Education Industry

Mobility is higher in fields like Manufacturing, Utilities, or Construction than in other industries traditionally thought of as mobile, like Information or Health Care.

| Period 3 Industry | % Upwardly Mobile | Average Salary Gain |
|--|-------------------|---------------------|
| Utilities | 62.5% | \$10,053 |
| Construction | 62.0% | \$11,607 |
| Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services | 59.9% | \$10,553 |
| Finance and Insurance | 59.7% | \$9,159 |
| Manufacturing | 59.3% | \$10,436 |

| Major | % Upwardly Mobile for Men | % of Men in Major | % Upwardly Mobile for Women | % of Women in Major |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------|
| Engineering Technologies | 62.9% | 2.2% | 63.7% | 0.3% |
| History | 52.2% | 0.9% | 56.3% | 0.4% |
| Mathematics | 61.0% | 0.4% | 64.6% | 0.2% |

enrollment in postsecondary education can also reap the benefits of increased loyalty and retention and continued access to people expanding their skills. Through benefits like tuition assistance, career and education advising,

access to computers for online learning, or flexible scheduling, employers and education providers can encourage and support ongoing learning and postsecondary attainment of working learners.

| Major | % Mobile for White | % of White in Major | % Mobile for Black | % of Black in Major | % Mobile for Hispanic | % of Hispanic in Major |
|----------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Computer and Information Science | 61% | 7.7% | 61% | 6% | 64% | 6.8% |
| Health Professions | 55% | 16% | 52% | 17% | 59% | 14% |

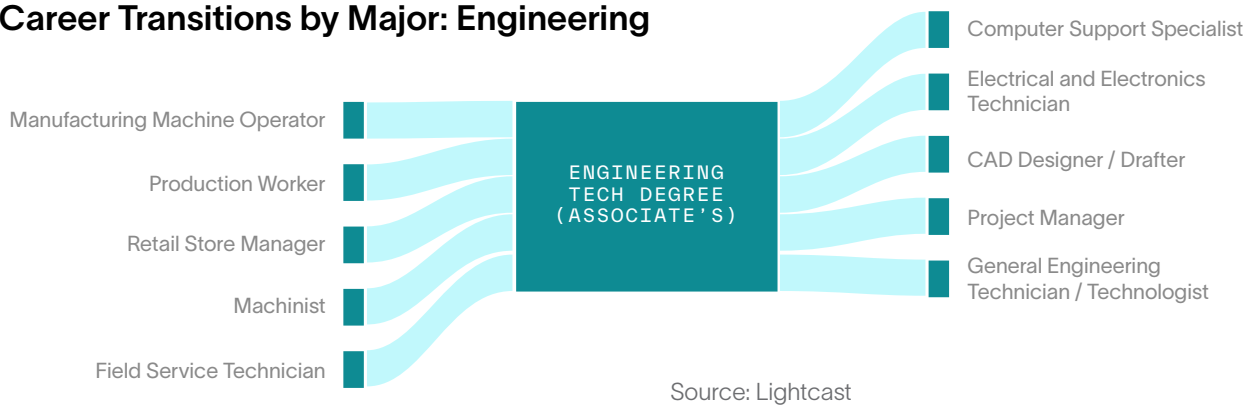
Source: Lightcast

Real-Life Transitions

Beneath the overall trends and patterns seen in our millions of data points there are individual workers and students building their own careers. While it's valuable to see the big picture and see broader trends in enrollment and mobility, the most practical application of this data will be on a case-by-case basis, where educators and employers can help one person understand what programs best fit their specific career.

Here are some examples from our data that show potential career pathways for adult learners.

Career Transitions by Major: Engineering



Manufacturing Machine Operators may find that their computer literacy, quality control, and hand tools skills make them good candidates for promotion into Electrical and Electronics Technician positions. They

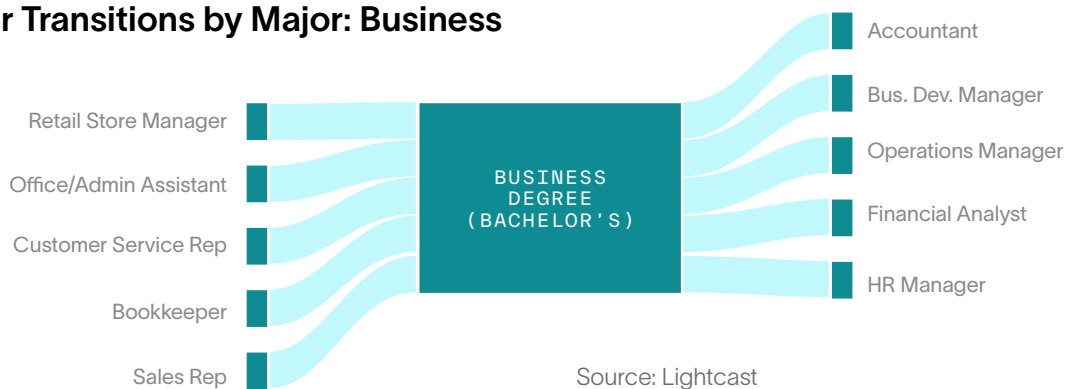
can make that transition happen by adding electrical wiring, electromechanics, instrumentation, and programmable logic controllers to their skillset through an associate's degree in engineering technologies.

A bachelor's degree in business enables a wide range of career opportunities for individuals in a diverse set of fields, from Office/Admin Assistant to Bookkeeper. With a degree, they can move into roles as managers or other advanced positions in similar or adjacent fields.

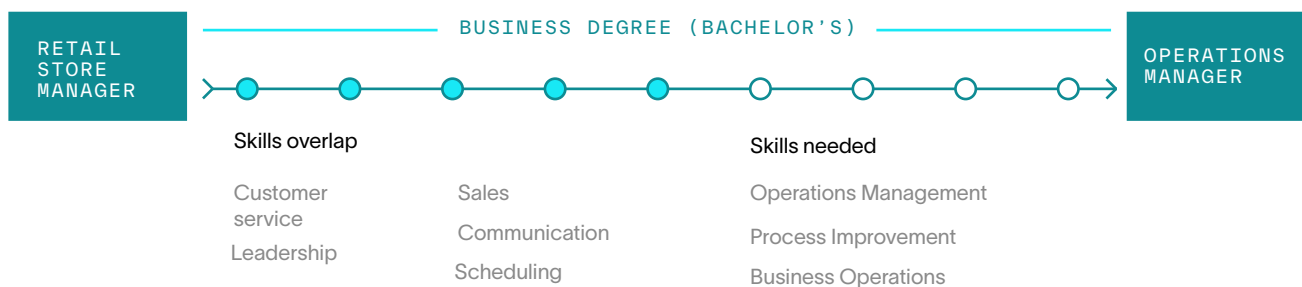
In a cross-sector transition, like moving from Retail Store Manager to Operations Manager (a job that focuses much more on business process management than people management), a potential candidate needs to acquire skills in operations

management, process improvement, and business operations, but likely already has necessary skills in customer service, sales, communications, and others. Here again, a business degree makes the transition possible.

Career Transitions by Major: Business



Skills needed to make the transition



Source: Lightcast

Conclusion

The data show that programs that enroll adult learners have proven their value to students who take advantage of these opportunities, enabling stronger career growth and, as a result, increasing economic mobility.

By offering those programs, promoting them aggressively to adult learners, and delivering them in ways that are friendly to working adults, parents, and others who are not typical undergraduates, institutions can promote the economic success of individuals in communities in their regions while simultaneously increasing their own enrollment numbers.

But this is not a one-size-fits-all solution where any adult learner can sign up for any course of study and immediately launch a new career with a pay raise to boot. Perhaps even more

than traditional students who come out of high school, adult learners need to know going in what skills are needed in the labor market. From there, they can also assess whether the colleges or universities they are considering actually address those skills required in the labor market, or whether an associate's or bachelor's degree makes most sense based on their goals.

And if these are questions that potential students are asking, then higher education institutions have an opportunity and responsibility, to provide the answers. Furthermore, institutions can use this data to be proactive in their recruiting. In reaching out to potential students working in Accommodation and Food Services, colleges and universities can show their appeal by sharing that adult learners from that industry see the most upward mobility, seeing an average salary boost of over \$15,000

annually. By understanding the skills adult learners need in a specific industry, individual departments or degree programs can reach out with a targeted appeal to workers who can make the most use of those skills. If recruiters redirect students that tend not to achieve mobility toward the most promising courses and programs, the entire community has the opportunity to benefit.

Education is an instrumental tool and investment individuals can use to advance their careers and build their own prosperity—no matter their age. And now even more than ever, higher education institutions have the opportunity to rethink their recruitment and enrollment processes, including reimagining how they balance their approach to traditional and non-traditional students.

Endnotes

1 https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/CTEE_Report_Spring_2022.pdf

2 <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2021/demo/educational-attainment/cps-detailed-tables.html>

3 https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17_219.10.asp

4 https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/CTEE_Report_Spring_2022.pdf

5 <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2021/10/14/has-covid-disrupted-the-postsecondary-pipeline>

6 https://nscresearchcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/CTEE_Report_Spring_2022.pdf

7 The BISG methodology was developed by the Rand Corporation to estimate racial and ethnic breakdowns in situations where organizations are unable—or legally barred—from collecting data. The method has been officially adopted by a number of federal, state, and local agencies, such as the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. The Virginia Department of Health and the City of Chicago Public Health Department have recently used it to estimate the racial and ethnic breakdown of people getting COVID-19 vaccinations, for example. Health insurance companies and consumer lenders have built this analysis into their systems to identify potential disparities in providing services. Analysis of BISG in peer-reviewed journals finds it is 90% to 96% accurate, depending on the specific population.

8 <https://cran.r-project.org/web/packages/gender/gender.pdf>

9 Adult learners are frequently defined as those who are at least 25 years old. Since social profile data does not contain age information and most individuals begin work and/or post-secondary school at the age of 18, we used a minimum of seven years of educational/work experience to estimate a cohort that was at least 25 years old.

10 This would include those like nurses or teachers where advanced certification comes with an automatic pay raise, even if the occupation and job title remain the same.

11 Since traditional learners do not typically work before starting school, we estimate period 1 salaries using the distribution of occupations from adult learners based on major and degree choice.

12 In 2020, Ashford University was purchased by University of Arizona and now operates as the University of Arizona Global Campus.

13 National Center for Education Statistics. (2022). Price of Attending an Undergraduate Institution. Condition of Education. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. Retrieved 23 June 2022, from <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cua>.

14 Based on U.S. News and World Report data, tuition at public online bachelor's degree programs costs an average of \$38,496, and \$54,183 for in-state and out-of-state students, respectively. At private colleges, the average tuition is \$60,593. <https://www.usnews.com/higher-education/online-education/articles/what-youll-pay-for-an-online-bachelors-degree>

15 <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/the-potential-of-online-learning-for-adults-early-lessons-from-the-covid-19-crisis-ee040002/>

16 <https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Saving-the-Associate-of-Arts-Degree.pdf>

17 <https://www.luminafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/permanent-detour.pdf>

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