

But what if I don't want to go to college?

What are the Alternatives?

College isn't for everyone, plain and simple, but American culture still pushes every high school graduate down that path. Stop! Wait! Whoa! While there used to be a stigma attached to not having a college degree, there are now many solid alternatives to not going to college as well. Remember, education is critical whether you go to college or not. There are numerous careers — in healthcare, technology, operations, transportation, and the building trades, that do not require a four-year degree. And as you advance in these careers, there is also nothing stopping you from pursuing a college degree at a later age — when it better suits you. Some people are just not ready for college until a little later in life. Here are some other ways for living a proud life without going to college, and still make good money as well.

Tradesman and Vocational School

Becoming a tradesman or entering a vocational school can be a great alternative to going to a traditional college, especially if you like working with your hands. There are a lot of options that lead to potentially well-paying careers. Apprenticeships, at one time, were the only way for young people to get a foot in the door to their careers. If you have an interest in a particular trade, such as technology or construction, seek out jobs in the trade that will not only give you valuable experience but guide you toward advancement by helping you with the certifications or licenses you need to succeed. Listed below are just a few of the top vocational jobs out there today.

Construction Manager

Average hourly pay—\$47.84

Top-end hourly pay—over \$76.12

Main tasks—Planning, overseeing, and handling the coordination of construction or maintenance activities (including budgeting and scheduling) related to specific building projects

Rotary Drill Operator for the Oil and Gas Industry

Average hourly pay—\$27.47

Top-end hourly pay—over \$41.91

Main tasks—Extracting oil or natural gas (or core samples) from underground sources by setting up and using large drilling equipment

Boilermaker

Average hourly pay—\$29.90

Top-end hourly pay—over \$41.25

Main tasks—Assembling, installing, or fixing very large containers or vessels designed for holding liquids or gases (such as closed vats, steam boilers, and boiler furnaces)

Aircraft Mechanic

Average hourly pay—\$29.42

Top-end hourly pay—over \$42.25

Main tasks—Inspecting, repairing, adjusting, or overhauling airplane or helicopter engines and other important systems

Avionics Technician

Average hourly pay—\$29.51

Top-end hourly pay—over \$40.03

Main tasks—Installing, testing, and fixing high-tech equipment used in space vehicles or aircraft for purposes like navigation, radar detection, weather tracking, radio communications, and weapons control

Pile-Driver Operator

Average hourly pay—\$29.68

Top-end hourly pay—over \$47.52

Main tasks—Using large pile-driving machines that are mounted on barges, cranes, or skids to hammer long beams of steel, wood, or concrete into the ground as part of a big construction project

Plumber, Pipefitter, or Steamfitter

Average hourly pay—\$26.94

Top-end hourly pay—over \$43.53

Main tasks—Putting together and installing, adjusting, or repairing pipes and related equipment used for liquid or gas distribution

Electrician

Average hourly pay—\$27.24

Top-end hourly pay—over \$43.47

Main tasks—Wiring buildings for electrical power, lighting, or communications systems (and maintaining or repairing those systems)

Crane Operator

Average hourly pay—\$26.58

Top-end hourly pay—over \$39.71

Main tasks—Lifting and moving construction materials, manufactured products, or machinery using mechanical beam and cable equipment

Wind Turbine Technician

Average hourly pay—\$26.13

Top-end hourly pay—over \$36.66

Main tasks—Installing, inspecting, fixing, and maintaining large wind turbines used for generating electricity

Millwright

Average hourly pay—\$25.94

Top-end hourly pay—over \$37.69

Main tasks—Assembling industrial machines, performing maintenance or repairs on them, and dismantling them when necessary

Brick Mason

Average hourly pay—\$25.69

Top-end hourly pay—over \$40.43

Main tasks—Constructing or fixing walls or other structures by placing and binding bricks, cinder blocks, structural tiles, or other similar materials

Commercial Diver

Average hourly pay—\$25.96

Top-end hourly pay—over \$40.26

Main tasks—Using various construction tools and scuba diving gear to help build, assemble, inspect, or fix components of large structures under water

Industrial Machinery Mechanic

Average hourly pay—\$24.95

Top-end hourly pay—over \$36.59

Main tasks—Fixing, maintaining, or putting together machines used for industrial processes like manufacturing or oil, gas, or chemical refining and distribution

CNC Machine Tool Programmer

Average hourly pay—\$25.75

Top-end hourly pay—over \$37.86

Main tasks—Giving instructions to computer numerically controlled machinery for making objects like tools, molds, and dies

Mobile Heavy Equipment Mechanic

Average hourly pay—\$24.43

Top-end hourly pay—over \$34.97

Main tasks—Troubleshooting, adjusting, and fixing large mobile equipment used for construction or natural resource excavation (such as bulldozers, road graders, cranes, and conveyor systems)

Construction Equipment Operator

Average hourly pay—\$24.31

Top-end hourly pay—over \$38.56

Main tasks—Controlling various kinds of heavy construction machines like front-end loaders, tractors, bulldozers, graders, and derricks

HVAC Technician

Average hourly pay—\$23.23

Top-end hourly pay—over \$35.26

Main tasks—Repairing or installing systems for the heating, cooling, and ventilation of buildings

Carpenter

Average hourly pay—\$23.24

Top-end hourly pay—over \$38.21

Main tasks—Constructing or fixing the wooden frameworks or foundation forms for buildings and related structures

Diesel Mechanic

Average hourly pay—\$22.45

Top-end hourly pay—over \$32.48

Main tasks—Troubleshooting and repairing larger vehicles with diesel engines such as trucks, buses, and, in some cases, marine vessels

Auto Body Repairer

Average hourly pay—\$21.72

Top-end hourly pay—over \$33.95

Main tasks—Refinishing or repairing the bodies and structural frames of cars and trucks

Welder

Average hourly pay—\$20.41

Top-end hourly pay—over \$29.85

Main tasks—Joining metal pieces together using handheld welding torches or related equipment

Automotive Mechanic

Average hourly pay—\$19.90

Top-end hourly pay—over \$30.80

Main tasks—Inspecting, troubleshooting, and repairing motor vehicle engines and other important systems and components

Enlist in the Military

Another great option is to enlist in the military. When it comes to job security, promotional opportunities, and even education, the military is second to none. And it's definitely a career choice that you can be proud of - there is no greater cause than serving your country. While the starting wages for basic enlisted personnel are pretty low, most of your basic living needs are taken care of - housing, food, clothing, insurance - so it ends up being a wash. Plus, if you enjoy adventure, there are opportunities that you can pursue down that course as well.

US Army Onalaska East Town Shopping Plaza 9380 State Road 16, Suite B Onalaska, WI 54650 608-784-8340	US Marine Corps 1500 N Superior Ave Ste C, Tomah, WI 54660 (608) 372-4027	Army National Guard 520 Mill St, Tomah, WI 54660 (608) 372-2858	Wis Nat'l Guard 107th Maint Co Fwd DS 602 E Division St, Sparta, WI 54656 (608) 269-4625
Wisconsin Air National Guard Volk Field 100 Independence Dr Camp Douglas, WI 54618 608-427-1448	US Air Force 3074 Village Park Dr, Plover, WI 54467 Phone: (715) 344-4351	US Navy East Towne Plaza 9380 State Road 16 Suite C Onalaska, WI 54650 608-782-4565	US Coast Guard Cumberland Metro Office 5523 N. Cumberland Ave. Suite 1201 Chicago, IL 60656 (773) 775-2451

Volunteer

Unsure and you're still in limbo about what direction you want to go in the future, you should consider volunteering before going to college or pursuing any other path. You can enter a structured volunteering program like Americorps or the Peace Corps, and you can give back to communities around the world.

If you volunteer overseas, typically your housing and basic living needs are covered by the organization. This can be a great way to take on an adventure you normally wouldn't have done, while still not taking on the burden of student loan debt while not knowing what you want to do with your life.

Get an Entry Level Job

I just don't know!!! If you want to work, but going into the military isn't a good fit for you and volunteering isn't the ticket - consider getting an entry level job at a large company. Nothing helps more with that transition to adulthood than holding down a full-time job. Your goal should be to move away from the companies that typically hire teens for part-time work to employers that can provide a future. Often larger employers have more opportunities, so start

your search there. Also identify employers whose product or service interests you and whose culture you respect. Many companies hire high school graduates into basic positions. Look for jobs in retail or the service industry for the most opportunities. When starting out, you likely won't make much more than minimum wage, but if you do well, you can typically rise through the ranks very quickly. In retail, you could move from hourly employee to shift supervisor, then even management. And being a retail manager can pay well - \$40,000 or more in many areas of the United States.

Business, Industry and Agriculture in the Tomah, Wisconsin Area

<https://www.chamberofcommerce.com/tomah-wi/business-industry-agriculture>

See website above for many entry level job opportunities

Entrepreneurship

Not any closure to finding an answer? How about embarking on an entrepreneurship instead. In fact, many famous entrepreneurs don't have a college degree: Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, and Richard Branson. If you have an idea, consider giving that a shot before going to college. When you're young, it's a lot easier to take a risk and get started than when you're older and have a family and larger financial obligations. Plus, the education you'll get from starting your own business is priceless. If you have an entrepreneurial spirit, this path may be smarter for you than going to college.

Attend Community College or Vocational School

A great way to ease into college and explore more about who you are and what you want to do in life is taking one or more classes at your local community (or technical) college. Classes are cheaper and admission much easier and many students work at least part-time to pay their way. You can either take a few classes, follow a diploma or certification track, or advance toward your associate's degree. Many community colleges have agreements with four-year colleges, so that if you decide college is right for you, you can then transfer those credits.

While in High School

Whether you work full-time after high school or if you have a part-time job while you pursue some sort of postsecondary education, it is important to prepare for the responsibilities of being on your own and managing your money, time, and character. Listed below are a few other items you may want to research a bit as you move toward your senior year.

Professional Skills – Get a firm grasp on the skills you will use in the work force. Computer and customer service skills, task prioritization, punctuality and reliability, and the ability to work well with others are aptitudes not often taught in high school or even college. As a result, many students are left grossly underprepared for entry-level jobs. Preparing for the future should include these skills.

Life Skills - Preparing for the workforce also requires life skills in order to handle the responsibilities that come with earning a paycheck and living on their own. Before leaving high school you should master how to fill out a tax return, budget your income and even balance your checkbook. In order to be fully prepared to take on life outside high school, students also need to learn how to deal with and move beyond failure. Handling failure with grace and learning from mistakes is a part of business as well as part of growing into a better employee and a better person. It's part of growing up!

Communication Skills - Furthermore, preparing yourself for the workforce and for life in general must include learning/practicing effective communication skills across all situations and platforms. From filling out forms and writing elongated reports to crafting quick, concise e-mails and from verbalizing ideas to a supervisor to making a presentation before a group of clients, you need to be able to formulate and convey your thoughts in a professional manner.

Preparing for the Future - Preparing for Life

After high school graduation, your close friends may scatter in different directions as they enter the next stage in their lives. Some are preparing for college, some are preparing to enter the workforce, and some are doing both. As you prepare for the future remember, many individuals are here to assist you to learn the skills that will help you succeed, whether you are transitioning from high school to college or preparing for the workforce.

From Kindergarten to beyond 12th grade graduation, you are growing, learning and changing, while experiencing all kinds of evolutions. Parents, teachers, counselors, and administrators have the power to make these transitional phases much smoother for you – so keep a close ear. Whether preparing to move from high school to college, or preparing for the workforce, adults can teach you the tools and skills you need to move forward.