

Some 2-year degrees beat earning potential of bachelor's

By Huffington Post

A college degree's impact on earning potential is well known, but new data questions whether an associate's degree can beat out a bachelor's.

Mark Schneider, president of CollegeMeasures.org and a vice president at the American Institutes for Research, told NBC many associate's degrees "are worth a lot more than I expected and that I think other people expected."

A recent CollegeMeasures.org report that analyzed wage statistics in Virginia found that of the most popular courses of study, recipients of four-year nursing degrees earned the most during their first year out of college with a wage of \$48,959. Those with two-year nursing degrees averaged only slightly less at \$45,342. This greatly outperforms some four-year programs, and other data says this phenomenon exists in other majors too. Political science and history majors' earned average was \$31,184 and \$30,230, respectively, in their first year out of college.

Additionally, students who receive an occupational and technical associate's degree could earn \$10,000 per year more than those with a non-occupational associate's degree, CollegeMeasures.org found.

There's more data to suggest that completing community college can sometimes earn students a ticket to the upper-middle class. NerdWallet's look at jobs that require an associate's degree showed the median 2010 pay for Air Traffic Controllers was \$108,040. Construction managers brought in \$83,860 and

radiation therapists received \$74,980.

To be sure, bachelor degree programs outperform associate's degrees in most industries. For example, engineering majors can look forward to a median starting salary above \$60,000, according to PayScale.com. But Schneider told NBC this pattern of finding workers with two-year technical degrees outearning many four-year grads has been consistent across the states it has studied so far.

"In the U.S., we've tended to think that the bachelor's degree is the only thing that matters," Schneider said, "and this data tells us that technical degrees from community colleges are hidden gems."