

High-paying careers that don't require four years of college

Brian Sodoma, for Maricopa Community Colleges Published 1:05 p.m. MT June 30, 2017



(Photo: Maricopa Community Colleges)

Crystallynn Ramos, 25, worked as a hair dresser for several years after high school. She enjoyed the work, but always saw herself as a nurse someday, but wasn't sure if it was ever the right time to go back to school. Then, her employer, in a rather cruel way, helped her make that decision.

About four years ago, Ramos needed to be hospitalized for a health concern. Once she recuperated, she learned she had lost her job.

"It really made me think that I wanted something with more stability and benefits," she said. "So, I went back to school."

Ramos looked to [Maricopa Community Colleges \(https://www.maricopa.edu/\)](https://www.maricopa.edu/) counselors to learn about prerequisite classes and how to apply to the nursing program at [Gateway Community College \(https://www.gatewaycc.edu/\)](https://www.gatewaycc.edu/). She also learned that under the school's cohort program, done in collaboration with Northern Arizona University (NAU), if she went to school in the summer in addition to her spring and fall semesters, she could earn a bachelor's degree in nursing in only two years.

Ramos chose to take more time to finish the program, but she's happy to say she landed her dream job in a burn unit only a few days after graduating in May.

"That's my passion. That's what I really want to do," she said. "I think anyone can do this. You just need to keep pushing forward, no matter what. ... There's great support here. You can network, make connections. It's more like a family than a school."

High-paying jobs available right now

For years, studies have pointed to higher education's link to better wages and lower unemployment rates. While bachelor's degrees are important, there are many high-paying occupational professions that do not require four years of full-time college.

[GateWay Community College \(https://www.gatewaycc.edu/\)](https://www.gatewaycc.edu/) President, Steven Gonzales, says it's important for students to understand these options are available to them and that if they choose the community college route, they can go to school at a fraction of the cost, he adds.

"You're going to pay about a third here of what you would pay at a private school for some of these programs," he said.

At \$86 a credit hour and high job placement percentages, these six degree or certificate programs available in the Maricopa County Community Colleges District (MCCCD) are a bargain. These half-dozen offerings, Gonzales says, only scratch the surface. There are many others available locally.

[Web Development \(https://asa.maricopa.edu/departments/center-for-curriculum-transfer-articulation/curriculum/degrees-certificates/search-programs?loc=Information&page=6\)](https://asa.maricopa.edu/departments/center-for-curriculum-transfer-articulation/curriculum/degrees-certificates/search-programs?loc=Information&page=6)

Credits needed: 19-66 credits

Median wage: \$61,520

Where found: System-wide

While an associate's degree is offered, it's not uncommon for web professionals and other IT experts to take courses for specific CIS certifications to advance in the field. If you're new to the field, you can use a certification requiring only a few classes to help you find an entry-level position. Then you can earn money while taking classes towards that associate's degree.

"You also see a lot of entrepreneurs in these classes. ... For IT in general, employers have a tough time keeping slots filled," Gonzales said.

GateWay Community College has also partnered with the [Year Up Arizona](http://www.yearup.org/about-us/our-locations/arizona/) (<http://www.yearup.org/about-us/our-locations/arizona/>) program to offer the Professional Training Corps (PTC), an intensive one-year program geared towards disadvantaged youth, or those between ages 18 and 24 who are not employed or in school.

With Arizona having one of the largest disadvantaged youth populations, the program provides hands-on computer science skill development for six months, then matches students to internships for six months, which often lead to employment.

[Diagnostic Medical Sonography](https://asa.maricopa.edu/departments/office-of-student-affairs/majors/diagnostic-medical-sonography) (<https://asa.maricopa.edu/departments/office-of-student-affairs/majors/diagnostic-medical-sonography>)

Credits needed: 86-118

Median wage: \$82,410

Where found: GateWay Community College

Medical sonography education trains students to perform ultrasounds. Sonographers are needed for a variety of medical situations, including, but not limited to, helping expecting mothers better understand how their baby is developing in the womb. Sonographers also help physicians diagnose disease or other health concerns by performing scans on the breast, prostate, female reproductive organs, heart and blood vessels.

GateWay students also benefit from the [Healthcare United at GateWay \(HUG\)](https://www.gatewaycc.edu/hug-clinic) (<https://www.gatewaycc.edu/hug-clinic>) clinics. The pro bono centers offer valuable hands-on experience for students, allowing them to work with actual patients. The program is nationally accredited and competitive and also requires an interview as part of the application process.

Engineering Technology

Credits needed: 63-93

Median wage: \$63,940

Where found: Chandler-Gilbert Community College, Estrella Mountain, Glendale and South Mountain community colleges

For every engineer position, there may be a dozen engineering technicians doing the hands-on work in the field. These electrical, electronics or civil engineering technicians can find work in industries like environmental protection, medicine, manufacturing, electronics development, and infrastructure improvement, explains Daniel Barajas, workforce development director for MCCCCD.

“You can take these applied skills and get to work very quickly,” he added.

The degrees are often a starting point for a bachelor’s degree, too. And in many cases, large employers may even be willing to pay for that four-year degree, Barajas said.

“What we find is that industry tells us once a student gets those core skills, you often see an employer wanting to invest in that person,” he noted.

Aviation Maintenance Technology (AMT)

(<http://www.cgc.maricopa.edu/Academics/aviation/Pages/Aviation%20Maintenance%20Technology.aspx>)

Credits needed: 65-92

Median wage: \$60,630

Where offered: Chandler-Gilbert Community College

Airplanes require plenty of upkeep and maintenance, and the industry is in desperate need of workers who can do the job. The aviation maintenance technology (AMT) program at Chandler-Gilbert Community College is the only FAA-approved aviation maintenance and flight program in metro Phoenix.

The program educates students for airframe and powerplant (A&P) mechanic positions or students can take classes to pursue entry-level employment in the field as well. If you’re already in the field, certification courses can be taken to move up and then those credits can be applied to the eventual Associate of Applied Science degree.

“If you love airplanes, this is a field with a lot of room for growth,” Barajas added.

Dental Hygiene (<https://asa.maricopa.edu/departments/healthcare-education-at-the-maricopa-community/maricopa-community-colleges-dental-hygiene>)

Credits needed: 95-106.5

Median wage: \$89,300

Where offered: Mesa Community College, Phoenix College and Rio Salado Community College

An Associate in Applied Science in Dental Hygiene degree prepares you for the licensure requirements to become a registered dental hygienist. Hygienists provide preventative and therapeutic oral health care under a dentist's supervision.

Demand for dental hygienists is expected to increase faster than the average for all occupations, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) and the Maricopa program is accredited by The Commission on Dental Accreditation of the American Dental Association.

Programs at the three colleges follow the same curriculum, but each campus emphasizes different schedule offerings. Rio Salado offers a fast-track 15-month program, too. Each program is competitive and has a student cap.

Nursing (<https://asa.maricopa.edu/departments/healthcare-education-at-the-maricopa-community/maricopanursing-programs>)

Credits needed: 62-75 credits

Median wage: \$74,260

Where found: All MCCCDC campuses, except Rio Salado and South Mountain

Nurses are still in very high demand. Hospitals are also requiring a bachelor's degree. That's why MCCCDC has partnered with NAU, allowing students to take university courses at the same time that they are completing core nursing coursework and internships through the community college system.

"Our students graduate in the same semester they earn their associates and bachelor's at NAU," Gonzales said. "It's year-round. It's very vigorous, but you can save a lot of time and money."

Graduates also must pass a state licensing exam before working in the field.

Learn about the many more [Maricopa Community Colleges \(https://maricopa.edu/\)](https://maricopa.edu/) occupational programs.

Sources: Median wage figures provided by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Credit information is from the Maricopa Community Colleges Center for Curriculum and Transfer Articulation website. Credit numbers vary because a program may have several degree or certificate offerings, each bring unique requirements and credit loads.

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