Helios Education Foundation

Billions in the Balance

What Arizona Stands to Gain from Increasing Postsecondary Attainment

Arizona's economic future depends in part on whether more residents can access and complete postsecondary education. The updated analysis shows that certificates, licenses, and degrees continue to create substantial value for individual Arizonans and, collectively, billions of dollars in economic gains for the state.

Arizona Still Has Billions to Gain

If the 2026 Arizona high school cohort reached the state's Achieve60AZ goal of 60 percent postsecondary attainment, it would lead to **$11.1 billion in overall economic gains for Arizona.**

These gains result from higher earnings, improved health, reduced crime, greater workforce productivity, lower public assistance costs, and other benefits for Arizona.

Other improvements would also generate substantial returns:

ATTAINMENT SCENARIO	ANNUAL GAINS FOR ARIZONA
20% increase in college enrollment	$5.8 billion
10% increase in college completion	$3.0 billion

More Postsecondary Education Leads to Greater Individual Gains

Postsecondary education produces substantial gains for individual Arizonans. Estimated additional lifetime gains, primarily from higher earnings and better health, increase with each level of attainment.

HIGHEST ATTAINMENT LEVEL	LIFETIME GAINS
Some college	+$217,510
Associate degree	+$354,110
Bachelor's degree	+$1,104,520
Advanced degree	+$1,384,180

The largest gains come with completed credentials. But even Arizonans who attend college without completing a credential are projected to earn more over their lifetimes than those whose education ends with high school.

The opportunity is significant: Among Arizona's estimated 78,080 high school graduates in 2026, nearly one-third are not expected to enroll in postsecondary education, and another 25 percent are expected to enroll but leave without completing a credential or degree.

Postsecondary Attainment in Two Key Arizona Industries

Healthcare and semiconductor-related manufacturing illustrate two distinct ways in which postsecondary education supports Arizona's economy. Healthcare is a large, established sector with well-defined credential pathways and persistent workforce demand. Semiconductor-related manufacturing is a rapidly expanding, capital-intensive sector with strong returns to technical, computing, and engineering credentials.

Healthcare: A large, established talent pipeline with substantial economic value

Arizona's healthcare sector employs an estimated 340,000 to 450,000 workers and, in 2025, accounted for approximately $51.4 billion of the state's GDP. Arizona postsecondary institutions award approximately 37,400 healthcare credentials each year, ranging from certificates to professional and doctoral degrees. However, access to healthcare pathways remains a challenge, as high-demand programs like nursing often have long waitlists and limited capacity, in part because of the significant resources required to offer and expand them.

Meeting projected healthcare employment demand would require:

8,700 more healthcare credentials each year

23% increase over current credential production

Producing those additional credentials would generate:

$12.9 billion in net lifetime earnings gains

$21.4 billion in net economic gains for Arizona annually

Semiconductor-related Manufacturing: A fast-growing strategic sector with high-value pathways

Arizona's semiconductor-related manufacturing industry employs more than 37,000 workers across relevant occupations and has attracted more than $314 billion in announced capital investment since 2020. Arizona institutions produce approximately 25,290 credentials annually in computing, engineering, and technical fields relevant to semiconductor work. An estimated 4,300 of those credentials are earned by graduates who will work in the semiconductor-related manufacturing industry.

Meeting projected semiconductor workforce demand would require:

1,240 more students to attain semiconductor-related credentials each year

28% increase over the current number of graduates projected to enter the sector

Producing those additional credentials would generate:

$1.35 billion in net lifetime earnings gains

$2.63 billion in net economic gains for Arizona annually

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