

Comparing Options After High School

	Description	Average Cost	Potential Earnings	Required	Typical Jobs
Workforce	Full-time employment directly after high school	\$200–\$1,500	Starting: \$30,458 Mid-career: \$42,234	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May need related job experience or certain skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accounting clerk • Animal caretaker • Childcare • Clinical, administrative, office clerk • Customer service representative • Driver • Food Services • Maintenance and janitorial • Retail worker
Military	Attend military academy or enlist before or instead of pursuing a college education	\$0	Starting: \$25,297 Mid-career: \$76,504	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ASVAB test • Fitness and health standards • Background check 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administration • Aviation • Combat officer • Construction • Engineering • Health care • Intelligence • Mechanical and maintenance • Public affairs and media relations
Short-Term Education	Short professional programs; certificate programs; or 9-month, one-year or two-year college programs	\$200–\$26,000	Starting: \$38,580 Mid-career: \$55,839	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requirements vary by program • Placement tests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Auto mechanic • Barber • Chef • Computer tech • Cosmetologist • Court reporter • Dental assistant • Fitness trainer • Nursing or home health aide • Pharmacy tech
Apprenticeship	Up to six-year programs	\$100–\$1,000	Starting: \$34,519 Mid-career: \$50,763	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requirements vary by program • May need to be minimum age • May require community college acceptance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carpenter • Electrician • HVAC installation and repair • Machinist • Mason • Pipefitter • Plumber • Sheet metal worker • Tool and die worker
Public Four-Year College	Institution funded by government and by tuition and fees from students	\$41,000–\$98,000	Starting: \$50,763 Mid-career: \$77,159	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core high school classes • Minimum GPA and possibly SAT/ACT score • Application (sometimes with essay, interviews and letters of recommendation) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Airline pilot • Architect • Computer programmer • Educator • Engineer • Financial specialist • Graphic designer • Reporter or correspondent • Writer or editor
Private Four-Year College	Institution funded by tuition, fees and private sources	\$52,000–\$132,000	Starting: \$50,763 Mid-career: \$77,159	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core high school classes • Minimum GPA and possibly SAT/ACT score • Application (sometimes with essay, interviews and letters of recommendation) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Airline pilot • Architect • Computer programmer • Educator • Engineer • Financial specialist • Graphic designer • Reporter or correspondent • Writer or editor

Sources:

Average Cost of Workforce includes the most recently published cost of work clothes, transportation to interviews and resume expenses. [Consumer Expenditure Survey - <https://www.bls.gov/cex/tables/cross-tab/mean.htm#cu-sizebyage> (Size of consumer unit by income before taxes; One person; 2023–2024 Excel file); 2 months apparel (\$182) plus 2 months transportation (\$1,114) plus \$200 for resume services]

Average Cost of Public and Private Four-Year College are based on the most recent net lowest and highest cost of attendance (after discounts on the published costs) per year multiplied by four years. [<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/colleges/university-of-iowa/tuition-and-costs>, etc. for public; <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/college-search/filters?stbd=private&stby=4&s=IA> for private]

All other Average Cost information is based on figures available online for Iowa programs. [<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/college-search/filters?stbd=public&stby=2&s=IA> for 2-year public]

Potential Earnings for Workforce are the 25th and 50th percentile salaries from the most recent U.S. Census Bureau PUMS data (1 year sample) – educational attainment up to high school diploma.

Potential Earnings for Military are private (E1, less than 2 years' experience) and first lieutenant (O2, 6 years' experience) from <https://www.goarmy.com>. [<https://www.goarmy.com/benefits/while-you-serve/money-pay.html>]

Potential Earnings for Short-Term Education are the 25th and 50th percentile salaries from the most recent U.S. Census Bureau PUMS data (1 year sample) – educational attainment of associate degree.

Potential Earnings for Apprenticeship are the 25th and 50th percentile salaries from the most recent U.S. Census Bureau PUMS data (1 year sample) – educational attainment of some college.

Potential Earnings for Public and Private Four-Year College are the 25th and 50th percentile salaries from the most recent U.S. Census Bureau PUMS data (1 year sample) – educational attainment of bachelor's degree.