

Study: Completion of a college certificate or diploma after a bachelor's degree

Released at 8:30 a.m. Eastern time in *The Daily*, Thursday, April 8, 2021

The educational pathways of Canadians are varied. A new Statistics Canada [study](#) released today looked at those who entered and completed a college program after having completed a bachelor's degree.

The study found that, among students who graduated with a certificate or diploma from a public college in Canada between 2010 and 2018, 8% had previously completed a Canadian bachelor's degree. For many of these new college graduates, the fields of study of their bachelor's degree and their college credential were related to each other, suggesting that the college program may have been undertaken for professional development. For other, often older, graduates, the fields of study of their college program and their bachelor's degree were different enough to suggest a possible career change.

The study, "[Completion of a college certificate or diploma after a bachelor's degree](#)," uses data from the Postsecondary Student Information System and the 2016 Census of Population to examine the characteristics and outcomes of recent college graduates with a prior bachelor's degree.

Leveraging these data sources enables a more detailed examination of educational pathways in Canada than was previously possible, such as the pathway of completing a college credential after a bachelor's degree. A clearer understanding of both the prevalence and the nature of such educational pathways is necessary for ensuring the renewal of the skilled labour force in Canada.

Although this article presents findings from before the COVID-19 pandemic, it provides important insight to better understand educational pathways that may become more common in the current context. While it is still too early to evaluate the structural and longer-term changes to the economy caused by the pandemic, the pursuit of further educational credentials may become a reality for a number of workers, especially those whose sectors have been more severely impacted.

About 14% of recent college graduates have previously completed a bachelor's degree or higher

Among students who graduated from a public college in Canada between 2010 and 2018 with a certificate or diploma, 14% had previously completed a bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree; a medical degree; or a university certificate or diploma where a bachelor's degree was a prerequisite.

Specifically, 9% had completed a previous credential at a Canadian postsecondary institution (8% had a bachelor's degree and 1% had a credential above the bachelor level) and 5% had completed it at a foreign postsecondary institution. The 8% of recent college graduates who had completed a prior Canadian bachelor's degree are the focus of this study.

The proportion of college graduates with a prior bachelor's degree varied by province; it was highest in Ontario (12%), British Columbia (12%) and Nova Scotia (9%), while it was lowest in Quebec (2%).

These provincial differences can be explained in large part by differing provincial postsecondary education systems. For instance, one major component of Quebec's postsecondary system is the completion of a general, two-year, pre-university diploma at a CEGEP. People entering these programs do not typically have a prior bachelor's degree. By contrast, Ontario and British Columbia have numerous postgraduate credential programs. These are college programs with program-specific entry requirements beyond a high school diploma, such as a previous college credential or bachelor's degree in a related field.



College graduates with a prior bachelor's degree are less likely than those without one to have studied college programs such as the trades or child care

The most common college fields of study of recent college graduates with a prior bachelor's degree were business, management and public administration (28%); health and related fields (24%); and social and behavioural sciences and law (18%).

Within these fields, recent college graduates with a prior bachelor's degree were more likely than those without one to have studied specific fields in college, such as human resources management and services (8% vs. 1%); registered nursing specializations (6% vs. less than 1%); or public relations, advertising and applied communications (3% vs. 1%).

By contrast, recent college graduates with a prior bachelor's degree were less likely to have studied the fields of trades, health care aide, vocational nursing, child care or office support programs in college. Specifically, male college graduates with a prior bachelor's degree were almost three times less likely than those without one to have studied the field of trades (9% vs. 25%). Female college graduates with a prior bachelor's degree were half as likely or less as those without a degree to have studied health care aide (1% vs. 5%), vocational nursing (3% vs. 7%), child care (4% vs. 8%) or office support programs (2% vs. 5%).

Among recent college graduates with a prior bachelor's degree, the field of study of the college credential is often related to that of the bachelor's degree

In many cases, the college programs taken by people with a prior bachelor's degree were not intended as a career change. Rather, they provided more specialized, labour-market-directed applications of skills related to the field of study of their bachelor's degree.

For example, 78% of recent college graduates whose prior bachelor's degree was in health and related fields studied the same field in college, and 56% of those whose bachelor's degree was in business, management and public administration studied the same field in college.

About 76% of recent college graduates whose bachelor's degree was in registered nursing studied a nursing specialization in college (e.g., critical care or neonatal nursing). Given that bachelor's degrees in nursing are associated with higher wages and a high job match, this is not generally a case of students needing to pursue additional education to find work in their field, but rather students wishing to enhance their skills. In fact, in many college nursing specialization programs, prior work experience as a registered nurse is a prerequisite for entry.

Among recent college graduates with a prior bachelor's degree, younger graduates are more likely to have studied programs related to their bachelor's degree

Among recent college graduates with a prior bachelor's degree, 81% were younger than 35, while 19% were aged 35 and older. The college fields of study of the two groups differed markedly.

Generally, younger college graduates were more likely than their older counterparts to have studied a range of programs that were related to their bachelor's degree. For example, they were more likely than their older counterparts to have studied social and behavioural sciences and law in college, which was the most common bachelor's field of study among college graduates with a prior bachelor's degree.

By contrast, older graduates were more likely than their younger counterparts to have studied fields similar to those taken by college graduates without a prior bachelor's degree (e.g., trades, health aide and secretarial programs). In many cases, the choice of these programs may have been related to a career change or re-entry into the workforce after a break in employment (e.g., because of job loss or child care).

Note to readers

The Postsecondary Student Information System (PSIS) is an administrative data file that records enrolments in and graduations from public colleges and universities in Canada. It provides extensive coverage from 2010 to 2018 and partial coverage prior to 2010. These records can be used longitudinally and combined with other data sources through the Education and Labour Market Longitudinal Platform. The 2016 Census of Population long-form questionnaire samples one-quarter of the Canadian population and provides education data on individuals who were aged 15 years and older at the time. This article uses a data integration between these two sources.

Recent college graduates: Individuals recorded in PSIS as having graduated from a Canadian public college with a non-degree credential between 2010 and 2018, and who do not have any subsequent graduations recorded in PSIS during that period (i.e., their college credential is their most recently completed credential).

College credential: For the purposes of this paper, college credentials are defined as non-degree credentials from a public college, as recorded in PSIS. They include both college postgraduate credentials and college credentials from non-graduate programs. They do not include bachelor's degrees completed at a college. Individuals counted as having a college credential are solely those who have a college credential as their most recently completed credential in PSIS.

College postgraduate credential: For the purposes of this paper, college postgraduate credentials are defined as college credentials that have program-specific entry requirements beyond a high school diploma (e.g., a previous postsecondary qualification). This includes non-degree college credentials from the following PSIS categories: post-career, professional and technical training programs; post-baccalaureate, non-graduate programs; and graduate programs. The vast majority of college postgraduate credentials fall under the category of post-career, technical or professional training certificates.

Bachelor's degree: Individuals with a bachelor's degree are defined as those with a bachelor's degree as their highest certificate, diploma or degree, as reported in the 2016 Census, and with Canada as their location of study.

The article "[Completion of a college certificate or diploma after a bachelor's degree](#)" is now available in *Insights on Canadian Society* ([75-006-X](#)).

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca).