

# DATA POINT

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
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## Employment Status of Postsecondary Completers in 2009: Examination of Credential Level and Occupational Credentials

This Data Point uses data from the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS). BPS follows a nationally representative cohort of students who have enrolled in postsecondary education for the first time. The BPS students examined here were initially surveyed in 2003–04 (at the end of their first academic year), then resurveyed in 2005–06 and in 2008–09. The final BPS:04/09 dataset contains information on nearly 16,700 students.

This Data Point looks at two employment outcomes for the 71 percent of 2003–04 beginning students who were not enrolled 6 years later (in 2009). The first outcome, employment rate, is the percentage of former students who reported that they were employed at the time of the 2009 interview. The second outcome, employment in a job related to one's field of study, is the percentage of employed former students who reported that their job was related to their major or field of study. These outcomes are examined for students who did and did not earn a postsecondary credential, and for those who earned a credential (certificate or degree) in an occupational versus academic field of study.<sup>1</sup> Readers are cautioned not to make causal inferences from the correlational data presented here. One cannot conclude from these data that employment outcomes are caused by differences in the level or type of credential earned.

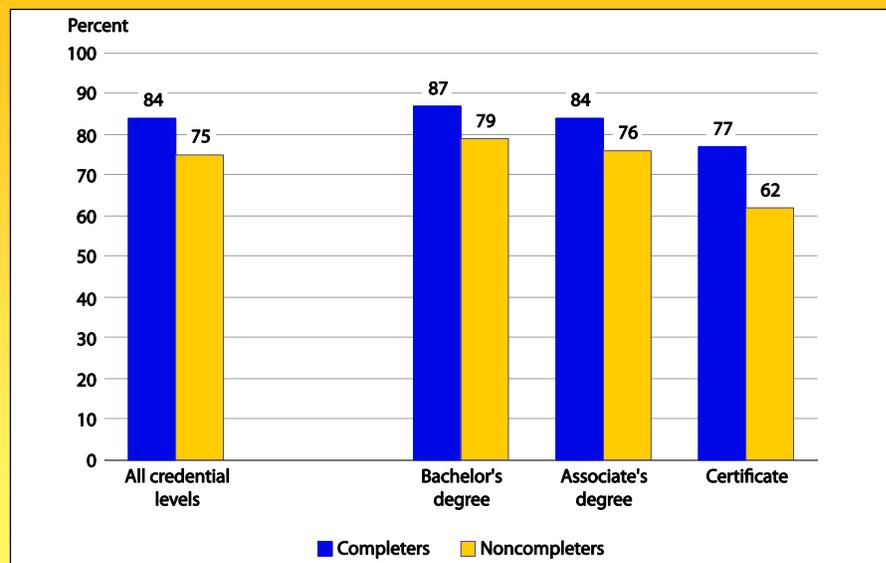
**Postsecondary students who completed a credential had higher employment rates than noncompleters, and those who earned a degree had higher employment rates than those who earned a certificate.**

Among students who began their postsecondary education in 2003–04 and were not enrolled 6 years later, 84 percent of those who completed a credential were employed in 2009,

compared to 75 percent of students who did not complete a credential (figure 1). Employment rates were also higher for completers than for noncompleters at each credential level. For example, 77 percent of certificate completers were employed in 2009, compared to 62 percent of students who intended to complete a certificate, but did not.

Among students who had completed a credential, those who completed a certificate had the lowest employment rate (77 percent), while there was no measurable difference between the employment rates of bachelor's and associate's degree completers (87 and 84 percent, respectively).

**FIGURE 1. Employment rate of 2003–04 beginning postsecondary students who were not enrolled 6 years later, by credential level and completion status: 2009**



NOTE: Standard errors for estimates can be found at <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ctes/tables/B03.asp>.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003–04 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, Second Follow-up (BPS:04/09).

To learn more about the BPS, visit <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/bps>.  
For questions about content or to view this report online, go to <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2016107>.

The remainder of this Data Point compares students who earned a credential in an occupational field to those who earned a credential in an academic field. Overall, students who earned credentials in occupational fields earned bachelor's degrees less often and subbaccalaureate credentials more often than students who earned credentials in academic fields. For example, 58 percent of occupational completers earned a bachelor's degree, compared to 85 percent of academic completers (not in figures; see <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ctes/tables/B07.asp>).

**Compared to students who earned an academic credential, a higher proportion of students who earned an occupational credential were employed in 2009.**

Employment rates were also related to whether students earned their credential in an occupational or academic field of study (figure 2). Overall, 86 percent of students with a credential in an occupational field were employed in 2009, compared to 82 percent of students with a credential in an academic field.

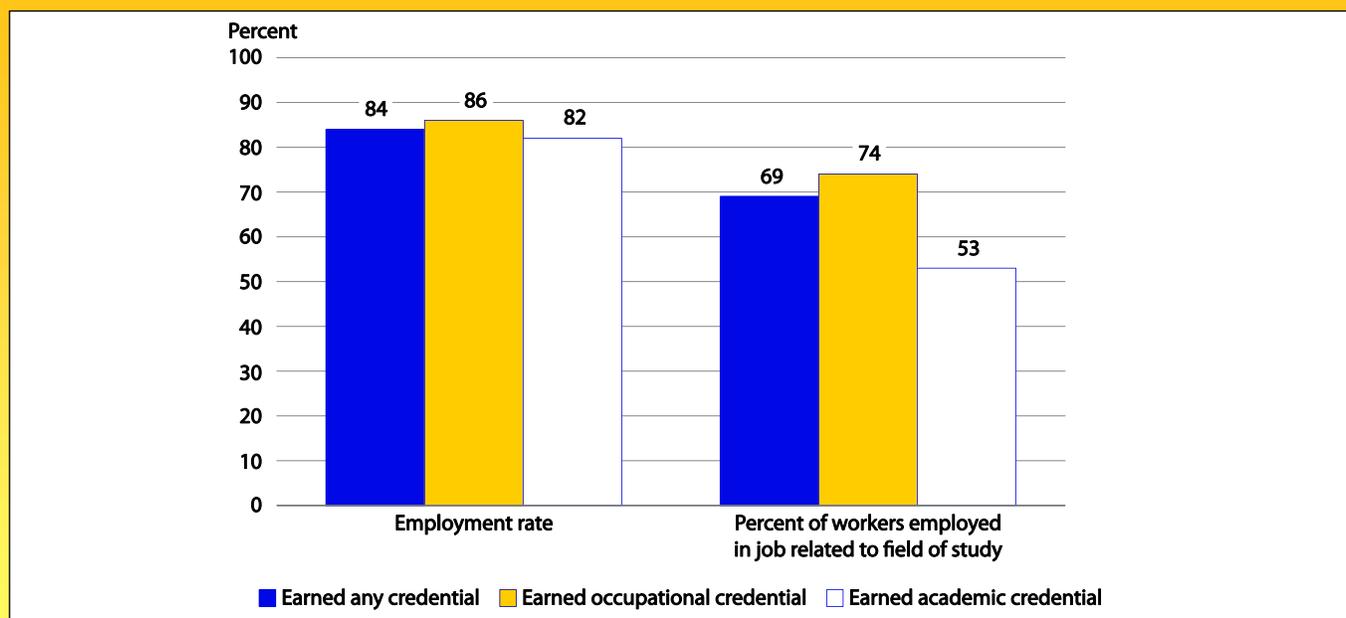
**Among employed completers, a higher proportion of those with an occupational credential reported working in a job related to their field of study, compared to those with an academic credential.**

In 2009, about 74 percent of employed completers with an occupational credential reported that their job was related to their field of study, compared to 53 percent of employed completers with an academic credential (figure 2).

**Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> See figure 2 for definitions of these fields of study. These categories are described in more detail at [http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ctes/tables/postsec\\_tax.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ctes/tables/postsec_tax.asp).

**FIGURE 2. Employment rate and percentage of workers who were employed in a job related to their field of study, among 2003–04 beginning postsecondary students who earned an occupational or academic credential: 2009**



NOTE: Standard errors for estimates can be found at <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ctes/tables/B03.asp>. Occupational credentials are credentials in the fields of agriculture and natural resources; business management and support; communications and communication technologies; computer and information sciences; construction; consumer services; education; engineering and architecture; health sciences; manufacturing; marketing; protective services; public, legal, and social services; repair and transportation; and visual and performing arts. Academic credentials are credentials in the fields of natural sciences and science technologies; English/letters; foreign languages; general studies and liberal arts; interdisciplinary studies; mathematics; philosophy, theology, and religious studies; and social sciences and history.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003–04 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, Second Follow-up (BPS:04/09).

This National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Data Point presents information on education topics of current interest. It was authored by Ashley Roberts of the American Institutes for Research. Estimates based on samples are subject to sampling variability, and apparent differences may not be statistically significant. All stated differences are statistically significant at

the .05 level. In the design, conduct, and data processing of NCES surveys, efforts are made to minimize effects of nonsampling errors, such as item nonresponse, measurement error, data processing error, or other systematic error.