

# Converting short-term coursetakers to graduates

Data to better support adult learners  
and grow enrollments

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# Adult learners are critical populations for community colleges to serve

- **Enrollments:** The number of high school students is declining, so colleges could attract more students by better serving adults with lower educational attainment levels
- **Earnings:** Securing a living wage job requires higher levels of educational attainment
- **Opportunity:** There are many more living wage job choices and job openings for people who earn bachelor's degrees
- **Equity:** Older students are less likely to complete an award than younger students, particularly bachelor's degrees, and communities of color are overrepresented at lower educational attainment levels

## Not all adult learners are the same



JOHN: 32 years old, working seasonal agricultural jobs, no high school diploma, single, no children, no stable housing, and a history of justice-involvement



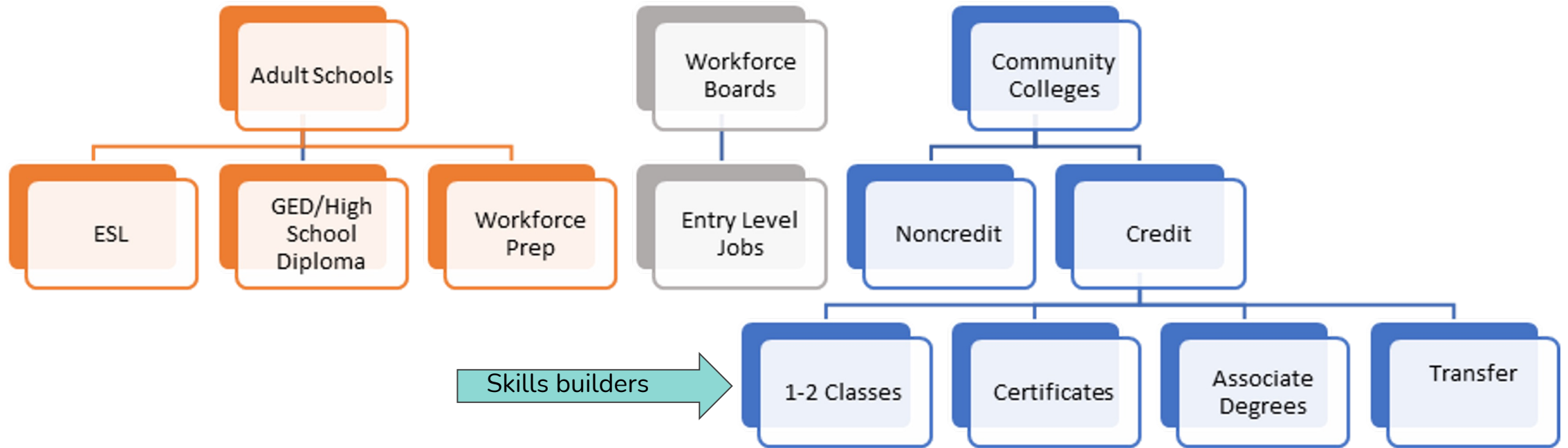
ASHA: 29 years old, unemployed, professional training in her home country in IT, married, 2 children under the age of 10, and a non-native English speaker



LUIS: 52 years old, unlicensed construction contractor, some community college courses, divorced, 3 teenagers, and limited digital literacy skills

To attract and serve adult learners effectively, colleges need to better understand the needs of various subpopulations who are 25 and older

# Adult learners gain skills through multiple systems, which address different goals



# Skills builders are community college students who...

- Enroll in community college for a short time (often 1 to 2 semesters)
- Take comparatively few credits, usually attending part-time
- Take classes mostly in career and technical fields
- Are highly successful in their coursework

# What have we learned about skills builders?

- They account for about 1-in-7 to 1-in-9 new community college entrants
- They are older, on average, than the overall student population
- They are disproportionately (but not exclusively) white men
- A sizeable minority have prior college experience
- They usually leave college without a credential and without transferring to a four-year institution
- On average, they reap meaningful earnings gains from their short time in college

# **Are you familiar with skills builders?**

What is your experience with skills builders?

- This is a new concept to me
- I've heard my colleagues describe skills builders
- I have friends or family who are/were skills builders
- I have been a skills builder
- My college has identified skills builders as a specific population to serve

# Why focus on skills builders?

- **Current students:** Skills builders are already successfully navigating enrollment at your college
- **Future students:** Colleges may not be clearly articulating skills building course sequences or their economic value, which means that some students may not know about these opportunities
- **More enrollments and completions:** By examining how skills builder course-taking relates to existing or planned certificates and degrees, colleges can identify on-ramps to longer programs or opportunities for upskilling
- **Clarity about labor market information:** Mapping discrete skillsets against both program offerings and labor market demand can help clarify ways to better prepare students for work while also focusing employer engagement
- **Economic mobility:** A majority of skills builders have not previously earned a certificate or degree and don't earn one during their time in community college. They often would benefit from engaging in longer-term pathways to improve earnings.



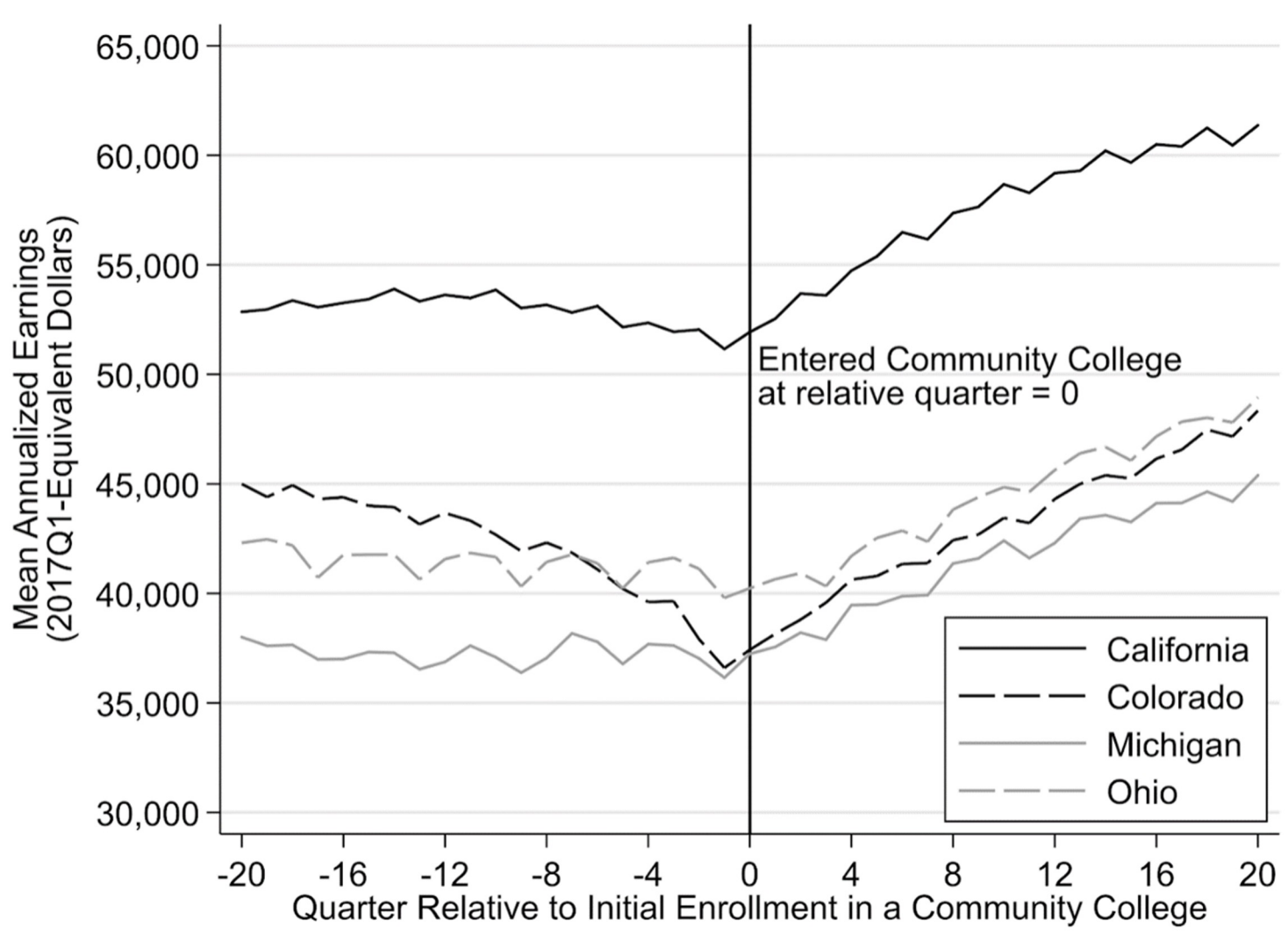
# Researching Skills Builders






# Background

- Information in this presentation was compiled through projects underwritten by ECMC Foundation and Ascendium
- Our goal is to understand how...
  - adult students are leveraging short-term course-taking opportunities to improve their earnings,
  - who is benefitting from this type of training,
  - how outcomes vary by course sequence, and
  - how skills builder course sequences relate to credential and stackable credential pathways
- Research was conducted by the University of Michigan, using student-level college and employment information from California, Colorado, Michigan, and Ohio

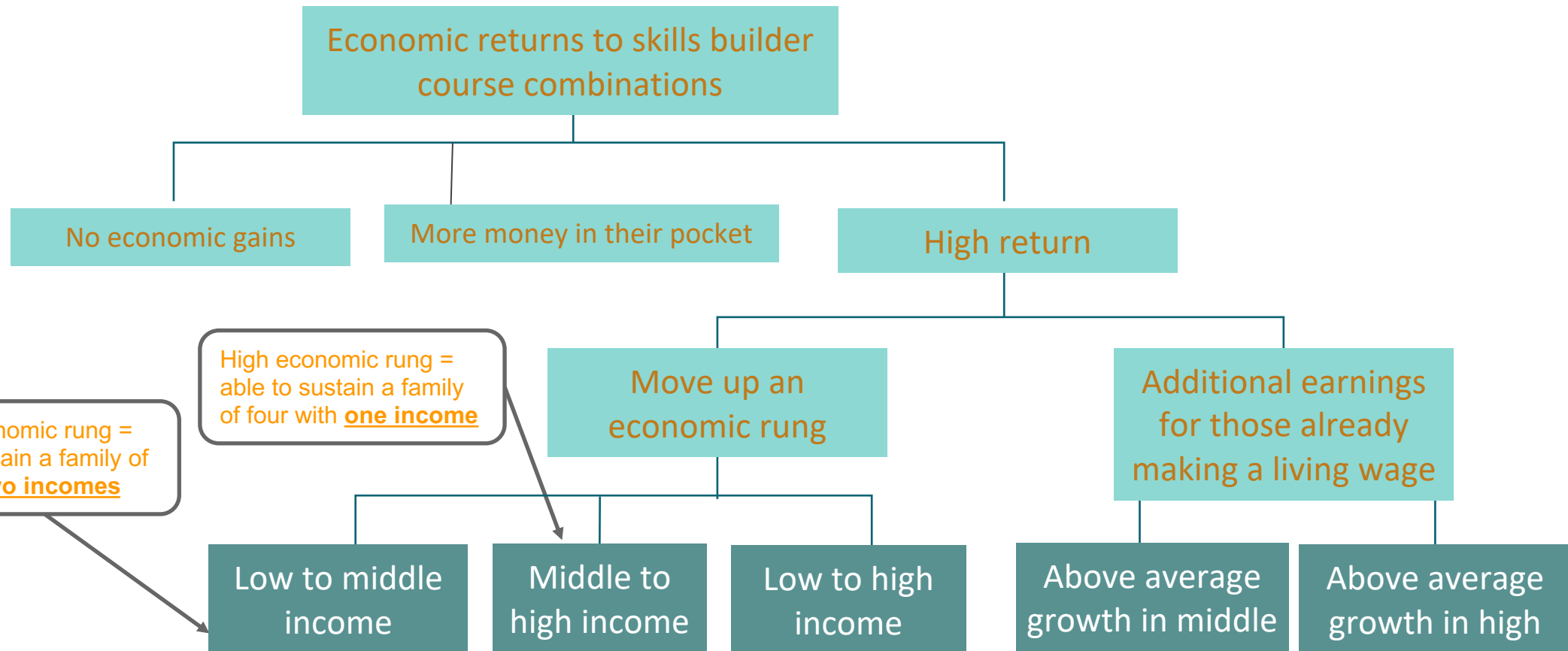
# Across four different states, there are clear examples of positive earnings gains for skills builders



# Aggregate earnings mask many different course combinations

	Number of students		Number of course combinations
All skills builders	61,915		20,747
Skills builders in popular course combinations	32,207		660
Skills builders in popular course combinations with earnings info	30,547		577

# Different course combinations have markedly different economic returns

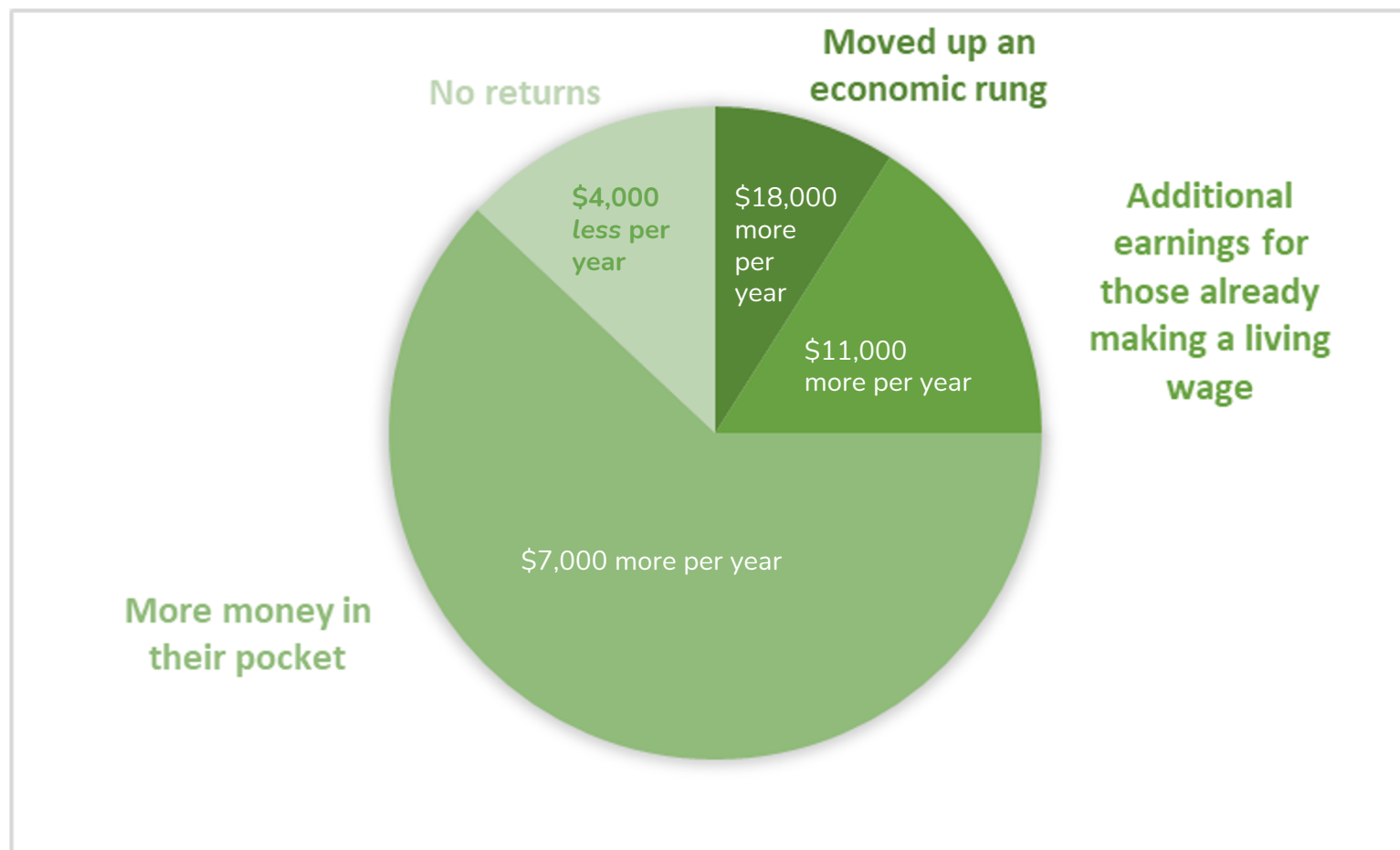


Analysis based on students who entered college between Summer 2007-Spring 2014 and includes earnings data through Spring 2019.

# Examples of course combinations with different economic returns

Field of study	No returns	More money in their pockets	Additional earnings for those already making a living wage	Move up an economic rung
Health	Medical/ Clinical Assistant	Nurse Aide Training	Health Information Management	Heart Saver First Aid
Precision Production	Environmental Engineering Technology	Scaffolds/ High Elevation	Practical Application – Reinforcing	Carpentry Safety + Scaffolds/ High Elevation

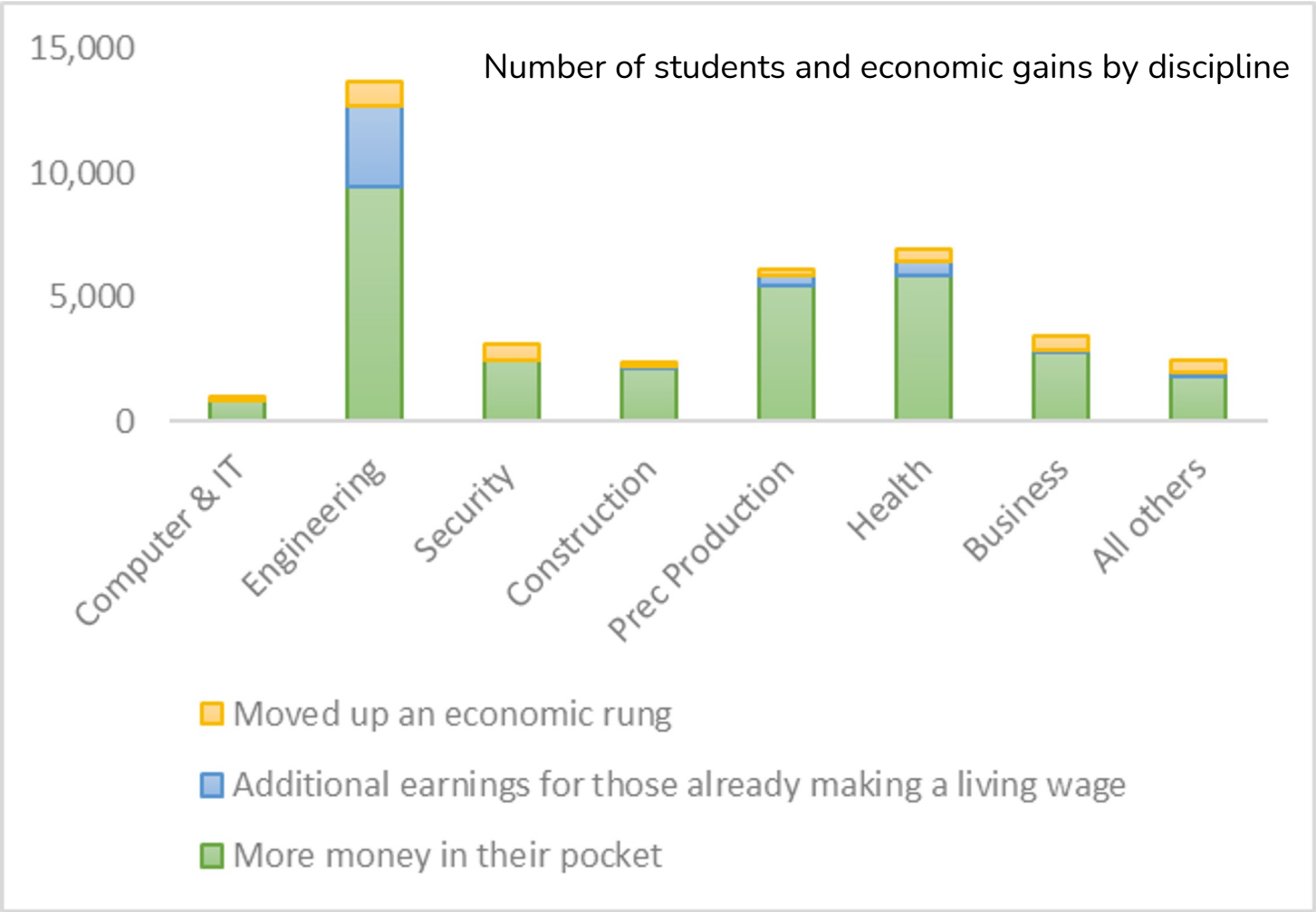
# Skills builder course sequences often support economic gains, but many do not advance students from poverty to living wages



Average earnings rounded to the nearest \$1,000. Figures show differences by comparing earnings immediately after exit and three years later.

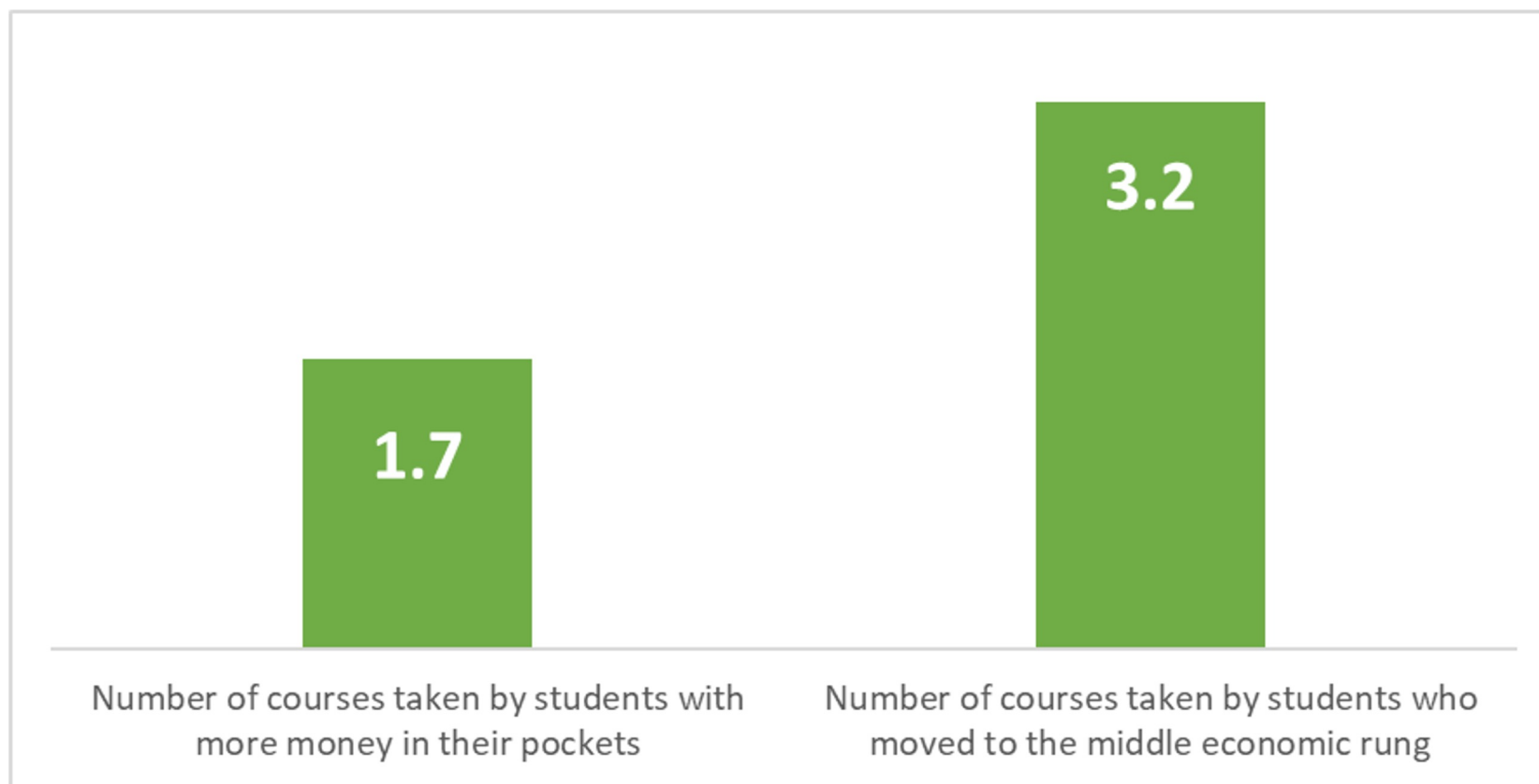
# Skills builder course-taking occurs in many disciplines

The disciplines in which students achieve economic gains from skills builder course-taking varies considerably by college. Analyses of specific course combinations and the types of students taking those courses can help pinpoint outreach and curricular improvements.



## Skills builder course-taking provides some economic gains, but better gains are found with longer sequences

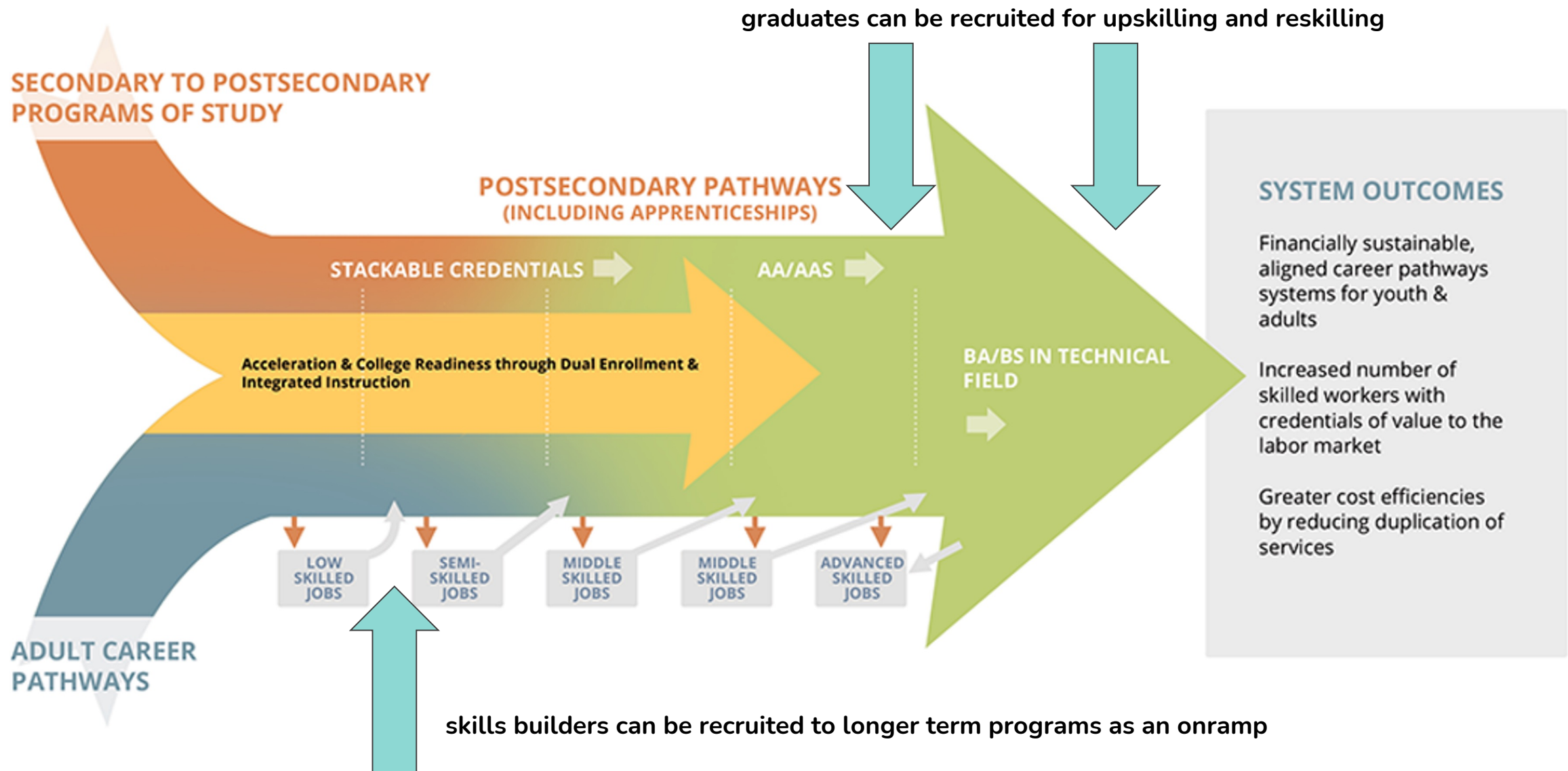
Students who moved up an economic rung took more courses than those who got more money in their pockets or who had additional earnings





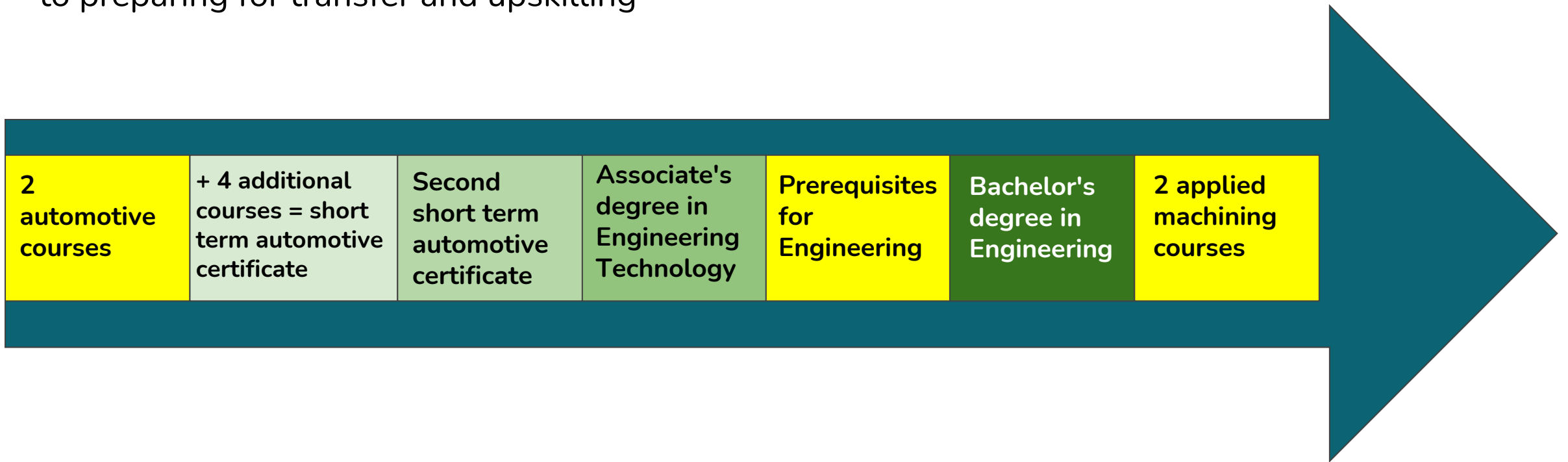
# **Applying Skills Builder Research**

By integrating skills builders into guided pathways, colleges can help to bridge general education and career education frameworks



## Example: Automotive to Engineering Pathway

Skills builder course sequences can be used in multiple contexts to help adult learners move from addressing immediate employment needs or opportunities to preparing for transfer and upskilling



# Skills builders could be informed about progress they already have made toward a certificate

- **Skills builder courses:**

Two course sequence in Automotive Engineering Technology

- Skills builders earned \$10,000 more

- **Short term certificate**

The two skills builder courses align with an Automotive Engineering Technology certificate that has a total of six courses

- Completers earned \$23,000 more

- **Stackable options:**

- Another short-term certificate in Automotive Engineering Technology
- Associate's degree in Engineering Technology
- Associate's degree in Automotive Engineering Technology
- Associate's degree in Construction Engineering Technology

# Skills builders could be recruited into longer pathways in high-demand industries

**Real World Example:** Zane State and Central Ohio Technical College can help train people to fill new jobs at Intel

- Both colleges have one existing skills builder course sequence that moves students up an economic rung (Zane State in Construction Trades and Central Ohio in Security & Protective Services) - lessons could be garnered from these successful offerings
- Both colleges have skills builders taking IT courses that are getting more money in their pocket who might be interested in further training
- The colleges could reach out to skills builders in IT and other relevant academic disciplines, provide information on how to extend their training, and clarify the types of jobs students could get at Intel with this training

# Completers could be informed about opportunities for upskilling sequences

- By identifying skills needed for high-demand jobs and consulting with employers, colleges can construct course sequences that enhance the skills taught in certificate and degree programs, particularly in the liberal arts
- Program maps can include skills builder course options that help with career advancement after completion
- Colleges can grow enrollment by reaching out to graduates and suggesting specific courses to take qualify for in-demand jobs

# What's Next?

## **College Work**

- By end of November: Using a methodology that we will provide for your IR team, identify skills builders within your college
- By mid January: Using a template that we will provide for your career education deans and faculty, identify the relationships between skillsbuilder courses and awards at your college

## **Resources That Will be Provided for the February Institute**

- Underserved populations that could be recruited into your skillsbuilder pathways
- How your college's skillsbuilder courses relate to high-demand skills and jobs in your region

## **Activities for the February Institute**

- Partner with employers, workforce development, and community based organizations to design pathways from skillsbuilder courses to program completion
- Learn strategies for outreach to specific adult learner populations about training and employment opportunities