

The Future of Work: Navigating the Next Decade of Jobs, Skills, and Opportunity

Thursday, February 26, 2026

Jeff Strohl

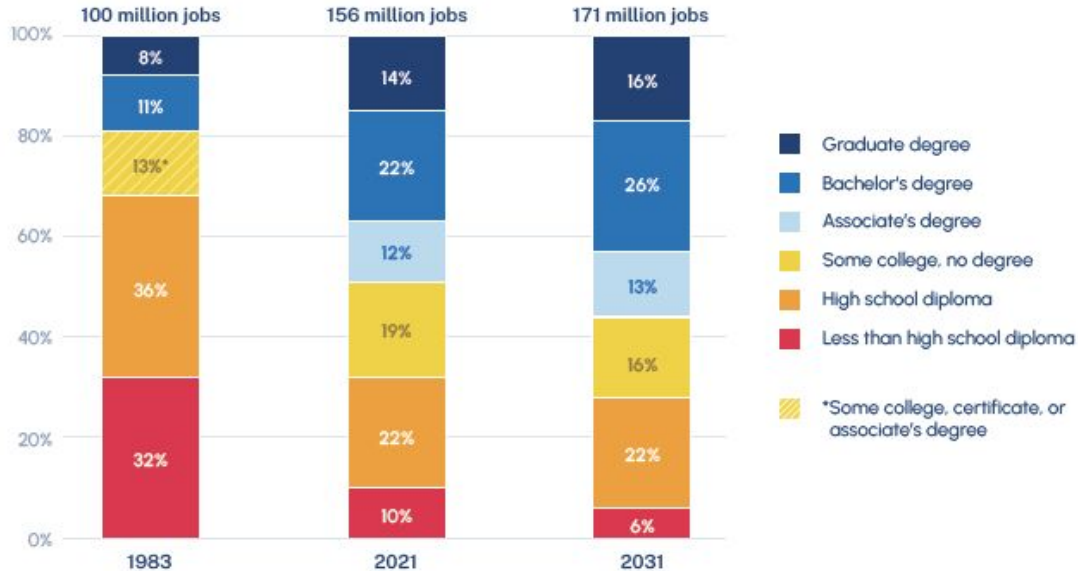
*Director, Georgetown University Center on Education
and the Workforce*

Postsecondary education is facing numerous challenges that will only grow.

- How do we balance continued delivery economic opportunity when faced with the charge that college isn't worth it and underemployment?
- How do we promote additional attainment in an environment where apprenticeships and trade school are so strongly promoted?
- How does Workforce Pell change the equation?
- How do we push back on ROI based measurement and accountability? and should we?
- Does skills-forward hiring demand a change up in education delivery?
- And, of course, AI!

Jobs requiring a BA or more are going to continue to grow

FIGURE 1. Forty-two percent of jobs in 2031 will require at least a bachelor's degree, while only 28 percent will go to workers with a high school diploma or less.



We've not kept up with postsecondary demand and now, with declining high school cohorts, we are facing major skill shortages by 2032.

4.6M too few BA+
760,000 too few middle skills

The economy is continuously demanding higher levels of cognitive skills as repetitive tasks can be automated. Even the auto mechanic has transformed to become the auto technician.

Facing the Challenges

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Postsecondary needs to tell a more honest story.

College is not a guarantee

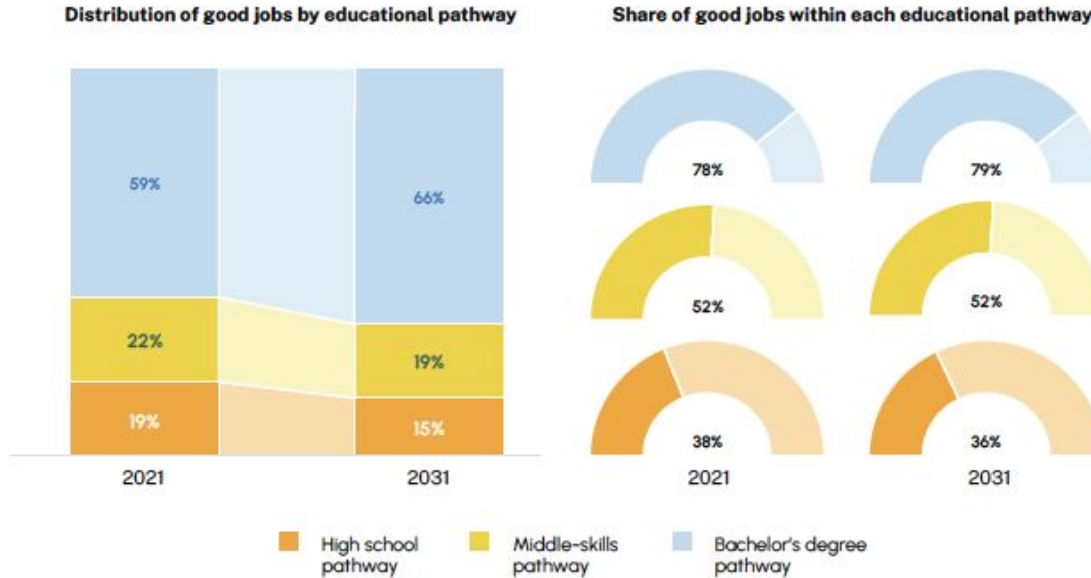
- it raises your chances of obtaining economic opportunity

The same charge need be addressed by proponents of middle skills

- sure elevator mechanics make good pay, but how many jobs like this are there?

President Biden spoke of all middle skills jobs paying over \$130,000 when promoting CHPS act – only 3% do

The bachelor's degree pathway will account for an increasing share of good jobs, reaching 66 percent by 2031, compared to 59 percent in 2021.



Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce projections using Carnevale et al., *After Everything*, 2023; US Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey (CPS), March Supplement, 1992-2020; and US Bureau of Economic Analysis, SARPP Regional Price Parities by State, 2020.

Skills-forward hiring should be embraced.

It pushes us to think about
occupations as skill bundles and
education as building portfolios.

AI is not going to take your job.

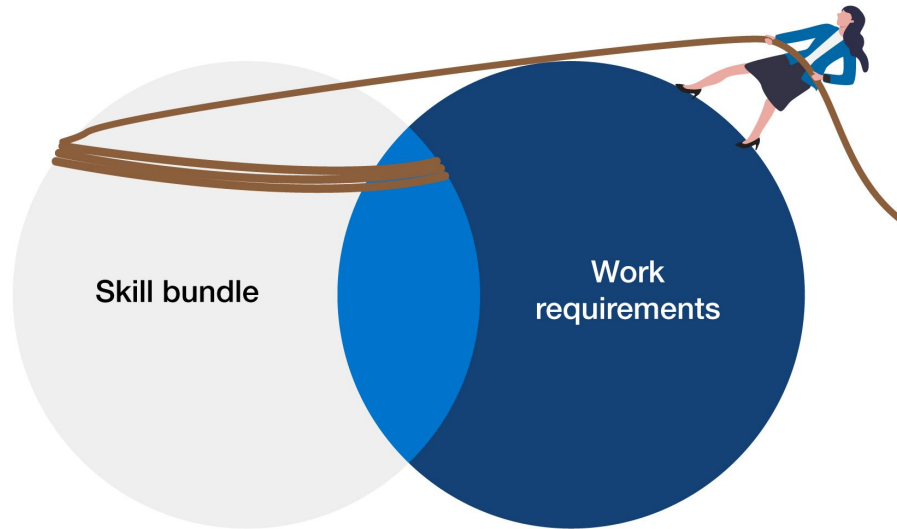
The person who knows AI is going to
take your job.



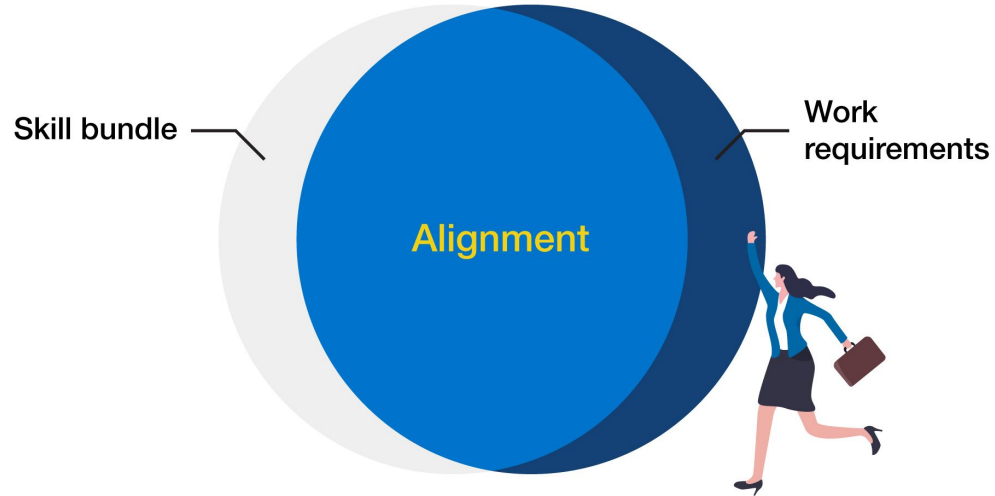
1 Curriculum generates skill bundles

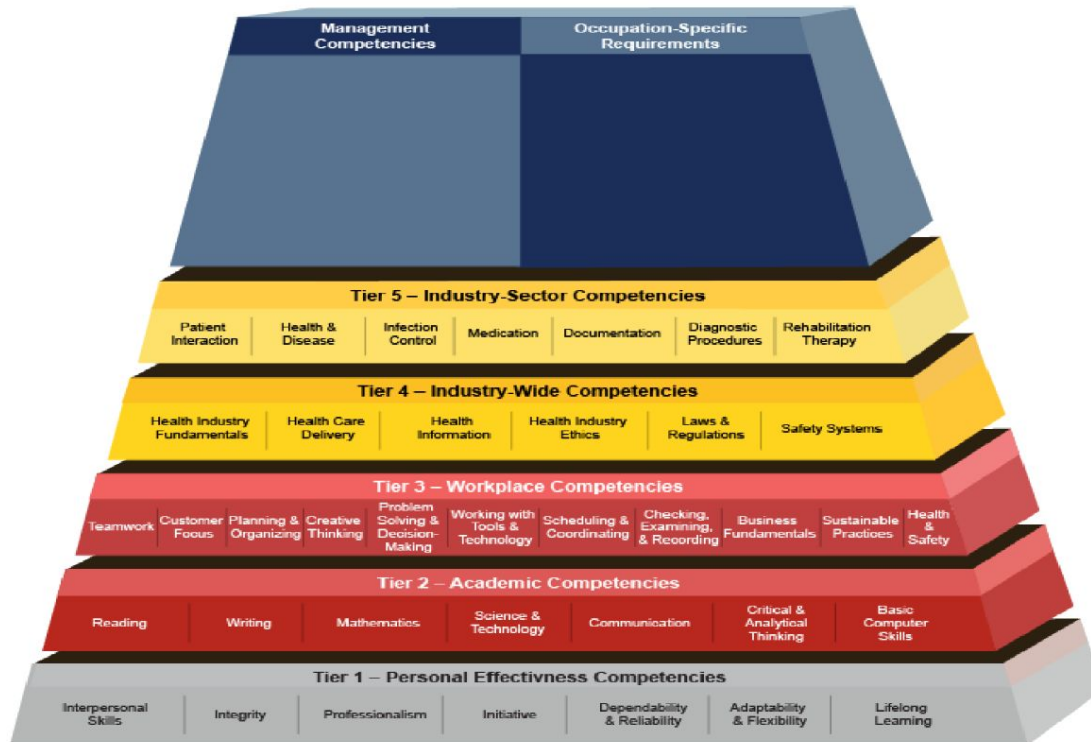


2 Sorting happens with first job as student becomes worker



- 3 First job leads to next and better job as job change helps align developed skill bundles with work requirements





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With AI threatening, we need to keep sight on the fact that over-investment in specific education hinders growth.

The secret sauce of American economic vitality lies in the mix of general and specific skills.

We need to recognize that **change is the nature of our economy and that our education system imbues flexibility.**

Rather than fear the future, we should be confident our postsecondary system prepares us.

The rapid pace of change means we need to embrace our strengths while building mechanisms that bring the workplace and the classroom closer together.

- **We need to figure out how to teach emerging skills** while recognizing that our current academic model can't turn on a dime.
- **We need employer engagement** to identify which work-relevant skill requirements are durable enough to build into curricula.
- **We need work-based learning** when the distance between skill changes begin to exceed the responsiveness of the academy.
- **We need employer-sponsored training** that doesn't adhere to academic restrictions, to ultimately merge the workplace and the classroom.

Universities must embrace their role in workforce development without losing their many missions.

Thank you

Feel free to reach out with questions and suggestions: js787@georgetown.edu



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