

## Everyone Can Use a Lifelong Degree

Faster, cheaper, specialized credentials closely aligned with the labor market and updated incrementally over a longer period, education experts say. These new credentials aren't limited to traditional colleges and universities. Private industry has already begun to play a larger role in shaping what is taught and who is paying for it.

**The proportion of Americans with a four-year college degree climbed to 36% last year from 9% in 1965.**

Hundreds of schools will close over the next few years, analysts predict.

Americans aren't turning their backs on education; they are reconsidering how to obtain it. Enrollment in short-term credential classes increased by 70% to nearly eight million over the same period last year, according to Jonathan Finkelstein, chief executive of Credly, a digital credentialing network, as freshman college enrollment dropped by 16%.

Coding boot camps, which started only a decade ago and teach students software skills in a few months, graduated around 30,000 students in the U.S. last year. The number of apprenticeships nearly doubled to more than 700,000 between 2012 and 2019, according to the Labor Department. They are expanding beyond trades into industries like banking and insurance. California has plans in place to increase apprenticeships in the state to 500,000 from 75,000 by 2029.

Companies like Alphabet Inc.'s Google, Amazon.com Inc. and Microsoft Corp. are launching programs that certify vocational competence and lead to well-paying tech jobs. In August, Google announced scholarships for 100,000 students for a six-month online certificate. The company said it would treat the certificates as the equivalent of a four-year degree if students apply for a related role at Google.

A 2019 Kaplan Inc. survey of 2,000 parents found that 74% favor a pathway for students to go straight from high school to a full-time job while taking college classes.

Elite schools like Harvard and Yale University will survive and even thrive but will occupy a smaller place in the popular imagination, much like prep schools, says Johns Hopkins political scientist Benjamin Ginsburg.

Less elite schools trying to stay relevant have begun offering shorter programs and creating longer partnerships with students, such as giving alumni the chance to brush up on skills through online classes. Four-year degrees will get telescoped into three and eventually two years, says Scott Pulsipher, president of Western Governors University. Academic credit will increasingly be given for work experience, and workers will return to school more frequently as the half-life of their skills shortens because of technological change. (*WSJ* – 11/12/20)

