



# How to Ensure Upskilling for All

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More than one-third of the top 20 skills requested for the average job in the U.S. have changed since 2016. One in five skills is entirely new. And certain sectors—including information technology, marketing, human resources, and sales—have changed faster than others, according to Lightcast, The Burning Glass Institute, and the Boston Consulting Group (BCG).

The need to upskill and reskill is imperative in a fast-changing economy, but many working adults around the world don't know what they need to upgrade their skills and don't know where to start or where to go to get what they need. What's clear from a virtual event held on this topic in March 2024—sponsored by Jobs for the Future (JFF)—is that there are multiple pathways for learners to follow to gain new skills, ranging from industry partnerships with colleges to apprenticeships to work-based learning.

Here's what you need to know:

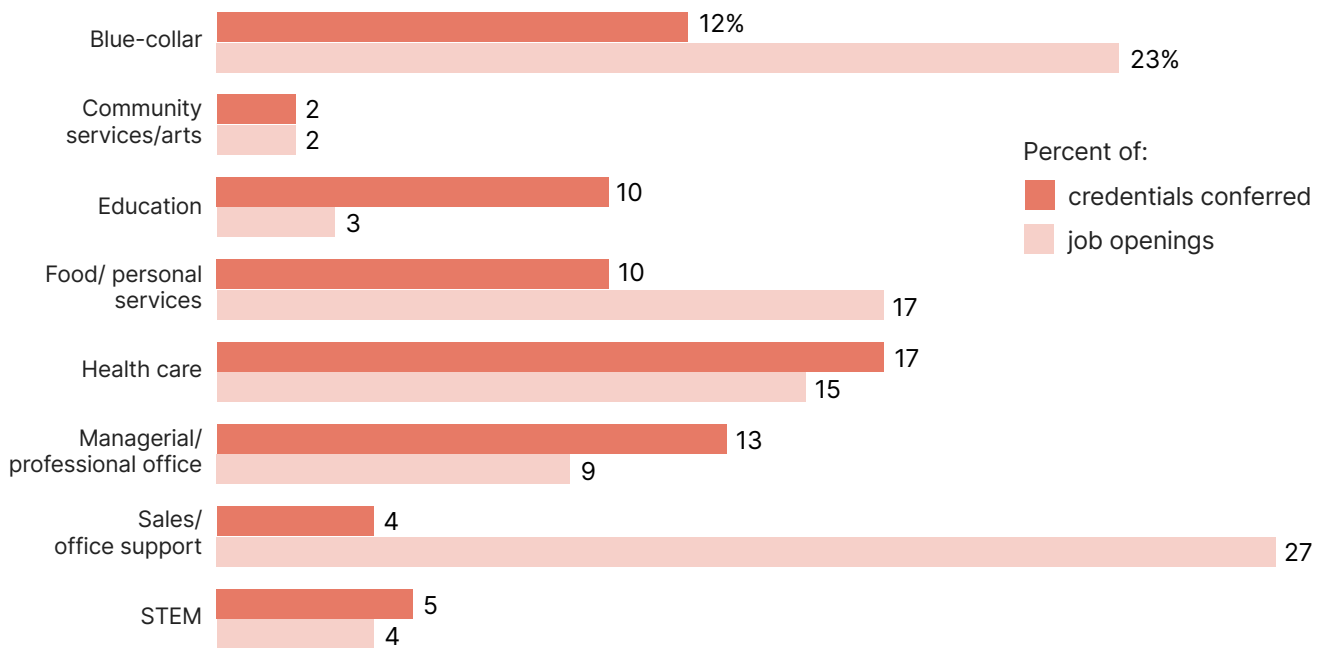
# 01

**Colleges and other training providers are working more closely than ever before with employers to determine their needs and build programs that meet those needs.**

FIGURE 1

## The Great Mismatch

One quarter of middle-skills credentials are conferred in programs of study that do not have a direct occupational match.



Source: Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce

## WHAT'S HAPPENING

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The Accelerated Skills Training program at Valencia College in Florida is a leader in the retraining effort nationwide. It has more than 1,000 graduates a year in everything from the 10-week Electronic Board Assembly program to the 22-week Robotics and Semiconductor Technician program.

- “We always start with conversations with local employers,” said Kathleen Plinske, Valencia’s president. The college focuses on industry clusters identified by the local Workforce Development Board as those where there is the greatest demand for skilled employees.
- The programs lead to industry certifications, Plinske said. “That’s really the measuring stick by which we know that our program completers are ready for the workforce.”
- The industry certifications can later be transferred to the college for credit. “If they want to continue their college education, they have the opportunity to do so and have a head start toward a degree,” Plinske said.

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**Kathleen Plinske**  
President of Valencia College



## HOW A PROGRAM WORKS

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Take the Electronic Board Assembly program, as an example. It was proposed by Lockheed Martin in Florida, which had significant need for individuals skilled in soldering and wire harnessing.

- The biggest barrier for working adults, according to Plinske and Johnese Harris, a working learner from Bellevue University in Nebraska, is the “opportunity cost” of not working while getting education and training.
- As a result, the curriculum isn’t designed around a traditional academic calendar, but rather how long it takes to teach the curriculum—in this case 10 weeks. “We want to make our training programs as short as possible to reduce that opportunity cost as much as possible,” Plinske said.
- When learners in this program and others at Valencia get a job at Lockheed Martin or elsewhere, those positions often come with tuition reimbursement, which makes it easier for them to use the credential to earn a degree.
- Industry partners also provide some of the instructors for the Accelerated Skills Training programs and 80 percent of the classroom time is spent in hands-on learning. “Because it is actually putting into practice the skills that our students need to leverage in the workplace,” Plinske said, “we found that that has really resonated with our students.”

## BOTTOM LINE

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Partnerships between employers and education providers are critical to fulfill upskilling and reskilling needs. But programs need to be designed around time-pressed working adults so that they find them relevant to what they need in the workplace and offer the opportunity for a better job on the other side. The credentials awarded must have currency in the job market and tie into degree programs so that learners, once in a new job, can continue their education to keep their skills updated.

# 02

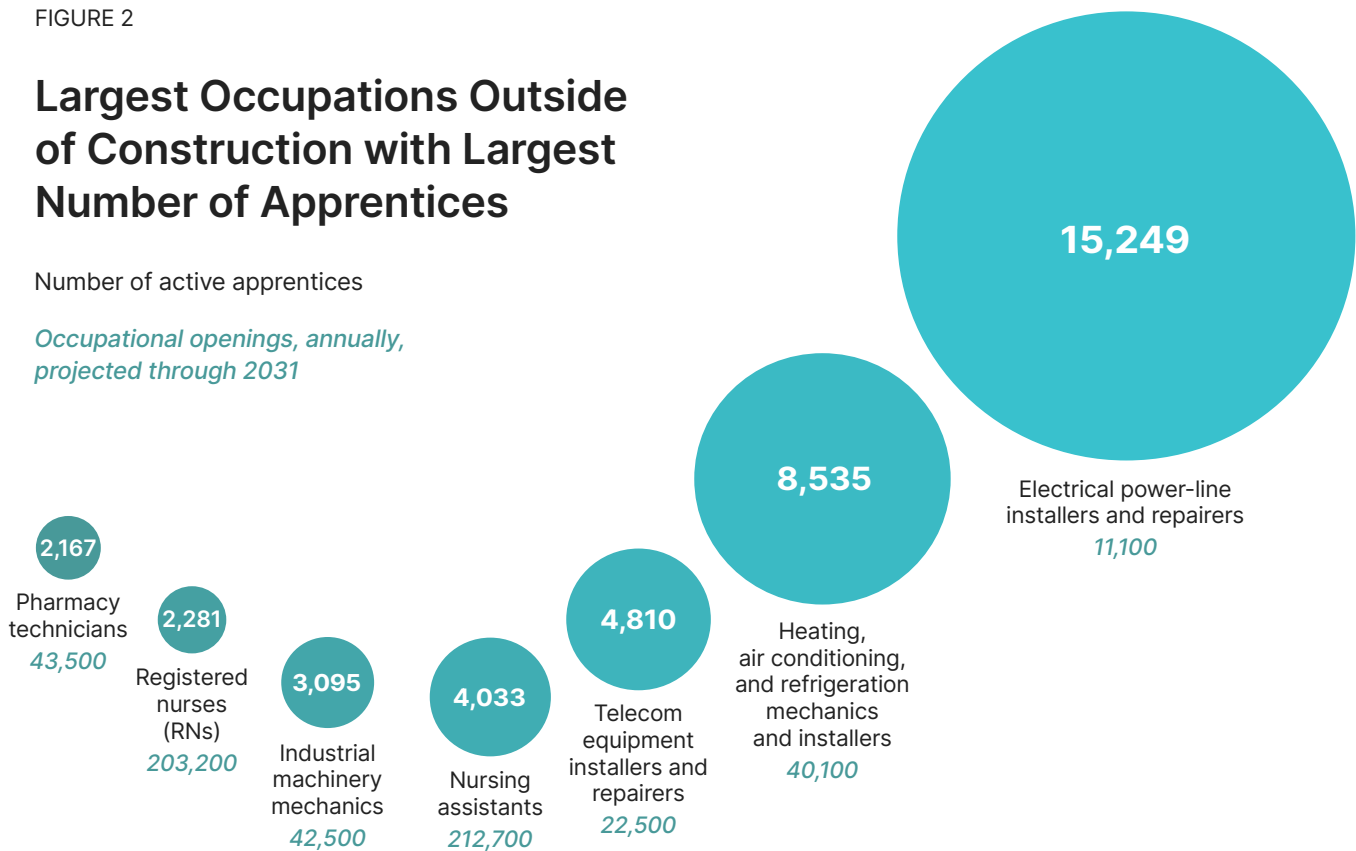
**Apprenticeships provide a pathway to a job and a college degree where work isn't seen as a replacement for a degree but instead is central to the educational experience.**

FIGURE 2

## **Largest Occupations Outside of Construction with Largest Number of Apprentices**

Number of active apprentices

*Occupational openings, annually, projected through 2031*



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics



## WHAT'S HAPPENING

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For much of their history in the United States, apprenticeships were designed for the building trades and as a replacement for a college degree.

- Now apprenticeships are spreading into many sectors of the job market, including health care, financial services, and education.
- “It’s definitely not just the trades,” said Mitchell Harp, Dean of Apprenticeship Programs at Trident Technical College in Charleston, SC. “Apprenticeships can be really done in almost any occupation though it’s usually in the occupations that are in demand where the employer has come to the realization that they’ve got to start building that long-term pipeline.”
- One reason apprenticeships are expanding is that community colleges like Trident serve as intermediaries and shoulder many of the tasks of a program, including curriculum development, apprentice recruitment, and ensuring quality training and mentorship.
- Trident manages 102 apprenticeships for 80 employers in everything from health care to engineering to local governments.



## WHY IT MATTERS

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Rather than being considered as an alternative to a college degree, apprenticeships are now increasingly seen as part and parcel of postsecondary education.

- Trident, for example, has a Pre-Nursing Youth Apprenticeship Program, where it enrolls students as young as sixteen, and employs them in an apprenticeship in hospitals over a two-year period. At that point, they have earned 20-25 credits towards a nursing degree. If they continue on after high school at Trident, they could become a registered nurse at 19. “Hospitals see this as a way to grow that long-term pipeline for the shortage of nurses in the Charleston area,” Harp said.
- Apprenticeships are also being used to upskill nurses into a bachelor’s degree as well. Increasing the number of registered nurses with a BSN is a goal of many hospital systems since research from the American Association of Colleges of Nursing has shown nurses with a BSN lead to better patient outcomes.
- Fairview Health Services of Minnesota offers an apprenticeship program to registered nurses who only have an associate’s degree, allowing them to continue working while earning the BSN credential and connecting classroom learning to their day-to-day job.
- Another advantage of the apprenticeship is that students earn higher wages as they move through the program and are given release time to attend classes.

## BOTTOM LINE

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The pathway to a good job or a better job in many professions has usually meant further education first. But now with colleges serving as intermediaries and working alongside employers to create and manage apprenticeships, the idea of work with education as a side hustle (rather than the other way around) is a viable alternative to the sequencing traditionally required to enter a career or move up in one.

# 03

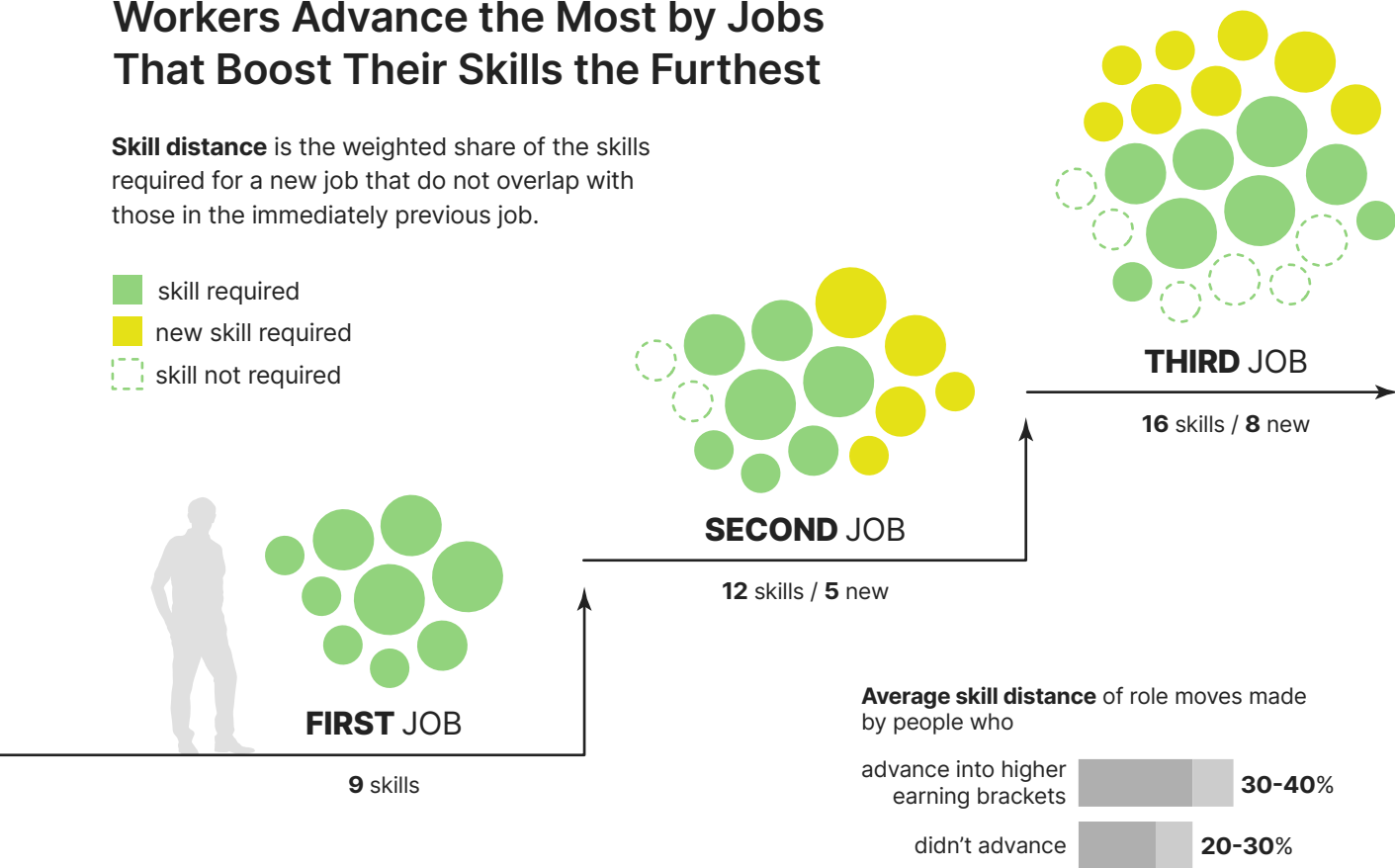
**Employers are using gigs, or short-term projects outside of an employee’s current role, to develop skills or provide exposure to other jobs.**

FIGURE 3

## Workers Advance the Most by Jobs That Boost Their Skills the Furthest

**Skill distance** is the weighted share of the skills required for a new job that do not overlap with those in the immediately previous job.

- skill required
- new skill required
- skill not required



Source: Human capital at work: The value of experience, McKinsey, June 2022

## WHAT'S HAPPENING

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The particulars of gigs differ by employers, but they are full- or part-time projects on other teams used to fill a business need.

- The voluntary on-the-job training outside of the employee's current role provides new skills, knowledge, and exposure to other jobs and people.



*“Before companies began launching gigs, employees who left signaled that they were not fulfilling their career growth aspirations or development.”*

**Esther Stine**

Senior Director / Organizational Learning and Development for Workday

## HOW IT WORKS

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At Workday, the gigs last anywhere from six weeks to six months, occupying no more than 20 hours a week, said Esther Stine, senior director of organizational learning and development at Workday.

- Employees input skills of interest into Workday's career development platform, which uses machine learning to suggest relevant gigs.
- The program offers flexibility in participation, from small engagements to larger projects, enhancing its appeal.
- “It's very much done in alignment with their manager,” Stine said. “There's a lot of support, collaboration, and mentorship. We're seeing that this is effective in getting employees upskilled and reskilled while also continuing regular operations.”
- At Workday, 36 percent of employees who participated in gigs in the last two years are more likely to move into another role, and 40 percent of those who did were moving upward.
- Before companies began launching gigs, employees who left signaled that they were not fulfilling their career growth aspirations or development, Stine said.

## BOTTOM LINE

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Retaining employees is critically important for companies, as is growing their own talent. Company-wide gig work is a personalized career development solution to the upskilling challenges facing employers because it allows them to move away from a one-size-fits-all approach.

Watch an on-demand recording of the entire virtual event





### **About the author**

Jeffrey Selingo is an higher education author and strategist who has written three New York Times bestselling books. His latest book, *Who Gets In & Why: A Year Inside College Admissions*, was published in 2020 and was named among the 100 Notable Books of the year by the The New York Times. A regular contributor to *The Atlantic* and *The New York Times*, Jeff is a special advisor for innovation and professor of practice at Arizona State University. He also co-hosts the podcast, *Future U.* and writes a regular newsletter called *Next*. You can find out more about him at [jeffselingo.com](http://jeffselingo.com).



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