

*Embracing Opportunity:
An Analysis of Efforts to
Meet Capital Region
Workforce Demand*



Baton Rouge Area Chamber®

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Overview

The overall state of the Baton Rouge Area¹ economy is strong, as the region is in the midst of an economic boom. The unemployment rate for the region of 5.7 percent is significantly lower than statewide unemployment, which is at 6.6 percent². Earlier this year, the MSA passed a record 400,000 total non-farm jobs mark, and the regional economy has grown by nearly 6,600 jobs over the last twelve months. In 2015 alone, Baton Rouge Area Chamber (BRAC)-assisted projects have announced 1,463 new jobs in the region.

With this growth comes the need for a robust workforce. According to job projection numbers from the state, skilled craft, healthcare, and professional services jobs will be in great demand in the Baton Rouge Area for 2015, consisting of a combination of new positions as well as

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existing jobs that will be available. This mirrors the findings of a BRAC-commissioned report by Newmark Knight Frank Economics Strategy Group (NKF), which projected a future need for industrial, healthcare, and professional services jobs for the Baton Rouge Area. Many of these jobs, especially in the skilled craft and healthcare fields, require an associate's degree or less. In addition, the annual wages for most of these positions are nearly twice the area's median annual income³, meaning that they are both high-demand and high-paying opportunities. Such positions include electricians, welders, carpenters, plumbers, registered nurses, and vocational nurses, among others.

The projected need for these positions is consistent with informal evidence collected through discussions with BRAC investors and other regional business leaders over the past several years. Because of BRAC's dedication to a strong, growing regional economy, as well as its responsibility as an advocate and change agent in the regional business community, BRAC has drafted this benchmark report addressing need, progress, and hurdles in meeting the Capital Region's workforce demands. The intent of this report is to focus the conversation on regional labor needs, and prompt change in the way projected employment needs are tracked, as well as how to develop a workforce to meet them.

Each year, the Louisiana Workforce Investment Council approves short-term and long-term, statewide and regional occupation- and industry-growth projections, based on recommendations from the Occupational Forecasting Conference developed through collaboration with Louisiana State University (LSU). For 2015, the Baton Rouge Labor Market Area was projected to experience the greatest growth in the industries of specialty trade contractors; heavy civil engineering and construction; ambulatory healthcare; hospitals; and professional and technical services. Because of the heavy overlap between several of these industries, occupations within these fields are most easily grouped into skilled craft (specialty trade contractors and construction); healthcare (ambulatory and hospitals); and professional services. There is a consensus between state occupational projections and local businesses in terms of the type of labor needed regionally, and significant steps have been taken by local education and training institutions to meet this need.

Training providers, including Louisiana Community and Technical College System (LCTCS) through Baton Rouge Community College (BRCC) and River Parishes Community College (RPCC), Associated Builders and Contractors – Pelican Chapter, and Our Lady of the Lake (LOL) College have expanded their skilled craft and nursing certificate/degree programs, and are looking to provide new, individualized workforce solutions to local businesses. In addition, LCTCS, LSU, and Southern University (SU) continue to provide a strong pipeline of professional services talent.

However, there are further steps that can be taken by these and other institutions, as well as local businesses, to ensure the workforce pipeline fulfills regional need. This report outlines not only major strides taken by state and local organizations, partnerships, and institutions, but also provides suggestions for improvements aligned with best practices in other areas of Louisiana and the United States. The purpose of this report is to guarantee that regional stakeholders are taking all possible steps to ensure a robust workforce, which is imperative to continuing the Capital Region’s economic boom, as well as to provide the skills and training necessary for the region’s citizens to seize opportunities for new or better careers.

Based on the research performed, BRAC concludes that stakeholders have begun to address the Baton Rouge Area’s workforce needs through expanding training programs for high-demand occupations, engaging in public-private employer-trainer partnerships, and committing to reach out to underrepresented communities in high-demand occupations. However, for the region to continue to improve upon the progress made in building a robust workforce, BRAC proposes the following recommendations:

- » **Expand existing programs, as well as adopt promising programs from other regions, which focus on destigmatizing high-demand skilled craft professions and promoting two-year and shorter-term degree and training programs**
 - The Louisiana Board of Regents should consider non-degree students “completers” for the purposes of data collection and funding
 - The U.S. Department of Education should follow Louisiana Workforce Commission’s recommendation and allow Pell Grants for short-term training and non-credit hour coursework, especially those that focus on skilled craft training
 - Other occupations must replicate the Nursing Workforce Diversity Think Tank’s efforts to diversify the occupation’s workforce through education and outreach efforts
 - Baton Rouge schools should embrace the “I Can Do That!” video program, created by the Lafayette WIB, as a means to educate students, parents, and other decision influencers on the realities and benefits of non-four-year degree careers

- » **Increase the use of public-private and employer-trainer partnerships in the context of training employees to adapt to evolving industry educational standards and required skills**
 - Local stakeholders should track the difficulties in obtaining Incumbent Worker Training Program (IWTP) grants, and advocate enacting policies that will ease access to the funds.
 - Training institutions and business should partner to create customized training free of the rigidity of the IWTP application process
 - Schools that award bachelor’s degrees in nursing and employers of registered nurses should create partnerships to ensure that registered nurses with only associate’s degrees receive the necessary coursework and training to meet evolving industry standards

- » **Focus on solving data breakdowns related to demand and output of labor regionally, most notably where major discrepancies exist between state-projected labor demand, local training institution output, and actual labor demand**
 - National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER) training institutions must begin tracking training by number of students rather than simply overall number of NCCER levels completed per-institution
 - Stakeholders in workforce issues, including local businesses and economic development organizations such as BRAC, must work collaboratively and transparently to ensure the annual projected occupational openings are based on the most accurate data possible

This report consists of four sections:

1. An overview of the Capital Region's projected workforce needs
2. Training and education institutions in the Baton Rouge Area that produce individuals for high-demand fields
3. Positive steps taken to address local workforce issues
4. A look at practices that could be adopted by regional stakeholders to better understand and address the region's workforce issues.



Baton Rouge Area Projected Workforce Needs

In June of every year, the Workforce Investment Council (WIC) reviews and approves short-term and long-term job projections recommended by the Occupational Forecasting Conference, based on collaborative work between the Louisiana Workforce Commission's (LWC's) Research and Statistics Unit and LSU economists. Concerning 2015 job growth in non-government employment, projections indicate large gains in skilled craft occupations, healthcare, and professional services work. In addition the LWC bases the Star-Jobs Ranking System, a ranking of the highest-demand, highest-wage jobs in Louisiana, on these projections. The ranking ranges from five-star, the highest-demand, highest-wage jobs to one-star, the lowest-demand, lowest-wage jobs. The table below lists the highest-demand four- and five-star occupations in which relevant training is needed for employment; the jobs are specific to industries projected to experience tremendous growth in the region.

<i>Four- and Five-Star Jobs in High-Growth Industries that Require Training</i>		
Job Title	Median Annual Wage	Stars
Skilled Craft		
Carpenters	\$37,954	★★★★★
First Line Supervisors of Construction Trades and Extraction Workers	\$58,135	★★★★★
Electricians	\$46,088	★★★★★
Plumbers, Pipefitters, and Steam fitters	\$45,187	★★★★★
Welders, Cutters, Solderers, and Brazers	\$44,768	★★★★★
First-Line Supervisors of Mechanics, Installers, and Repairers	\$60,685	★★★★★
Operating Engineers and Other Construction Equipment Operators	\$36,339	★★★★★
Construction Managers	\$83,763	★★★★★
Chemical Plant and System Operators	\$69,030	★★★★★
Chemical Equipment Operators and Tenders	\$66,448	★★★★★
Healthcare		
Registered Nurses	\$62,749	★★★★★
Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses	\$38,003	★★★★★
Professional and Technical Services		
Accountants and Auditors	\$62,026	★★★★★
Chemical Engineers	\$118,474	★★★★★
Executive Secretaries and Executive Administrative Assistants	\$38,269	★★★★★
Sales Representative, Wholesale and Manufacturing, Except Technical and Scientific Products	\$57,669	★★★★★

(Based on BRAC analysis of Louisiana Workforce Commission's 2015 Regional Labor Market Area 2 projections)

These numbers are based on a combination of industry-level employment information gathered by the state and staffing-pattern surveys conducted by LSU.

The occupations listed reflect realities relayed to BRAC by stakeholders in the pertinent industries. However, industrial construction and manufacturing companies have explained that because of the high demand for skilled workers such as welders, the average salary can be much higher than the number stated above. In terms of healthcare, the need for skilled, trained nurses is projected to experience significant annual expansion as the industry grows in the Capital Region.

Local Training Providers

The Baton Rouge Area has a number of public and private colleges and technical schools that train individuals for high-demand occupations. This section briefly describes each relevant institution, as well as the type of training they provide.

Louisiana Community and Technical College System (LCTCS) Institutions

Local LCTCS institutions, namely BRCC and RPCC, are state-operated community and technical colleges. These schools offer a number of associate's degree, certificate, and skilled craft training programs. Combined, these two colleges accounted for over 2,050 National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER)⁴ level completions in 2014-2015, which included skilled craft programs such as welding, pipefitting, electrical work, and others in high-demand, high-wage fields.

In addition, LCTCS schools offer programs in the field of healthcare, specifically associate's degrees for registered nursing, as well as certificates for licensed practical and licensed vocational nurses (LPNs).

Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) – Pelican Chapter

ABC is a private open shop operated by regional businesses, which focuses in part on providing quality skilled craft training for those looking to enter the construction industry. The institution produces a high number of individuals that have received NCCER training for skilled craft work: In 2014, more than five hundred students completed four levels of NCCER training in electrical work, while more than three hundred completed the same for plumbing and pipefitting. While it may require some geographic mobility, ABC maintains that an extremely high percentage of graduates find employment in their area of expertise after graduation.

Labor Unions

Another set of training providers for skilled craft work are local labor unions. Accounting for the various unions in the Baton Rouge Area, each year more than one hundred new individuals qualify as journeymen – this designation indicates that an individual has completed the field and classroom hours for a formal apprenticeship in a specific skill or craft, such as welding, electrical work, or pipefitting. Upon completion of apprenticeships, many graduates do, however, choose non-union routes.

Our Lady of the Lake College (LOL)

LOL is a private college with a focus on healthcare professions. In terms of high-demand occupations, LOL graduated 31 LPNs in 2014, as well as 185 registered nurses. Among registered nurses, it is important to note that approximately half received their associate's degree, while the other half received their bachelor's degree (BSN) in nursing.

Southern University (SU)

SU is a four-year university with a full range of academic curricula. In terms of high-demand/high-wage jobs, SU regularly graduates nurses, accountants, engineers, and construction managers. In 2012, its nursing school – which graduates exclusively BSN registered nurses – was rated the top nursing school in Louisiana. In addition, the College of Engineering is one of the top-ten producers of African American engineers, which contributes to diversity within the regional engineering workforce.

Louisiana State University (LSU)

LSU, like SU, offers a range of four-year degree programs, several of which develop talent for high-demand/high-wage occupations. The College of Engineering graduates nearly one hundred chemical engineers annually, as well as a significant number of civil engineers and construction managers. In addition, several marketing programs in the College of Business translate into wholesale sales representative positions. According to state projections, LSU is the only institution in the region training individuals for these high-demand sales openings.

Recent Progress in Addressing Workforce Demand

The above-mentioned institutions have adopted a number of strategies to meet the projected workforce demand in skilled craft, healthcare, and professional services industries. The most significant steps taken include expansion of programs producing high-demand trainees, employer-trainer and other public-private partnerships, and effective outreach to potential students and trainees. In addition, the state has developed a series of programs aimed at assisting individuals seeking training in order to achieve employment, as well as employers seeking to train existing employees to fill high-demand roles.

Expansion of High-Demand Occupation Programs

In response to the high demand for labor in skilled craft and healthcare occupations, several local institutions have expanded or are in the process of expanding training opportunities in these fields. For instance, BRCC is in the midst of converting its Acadian Campus to a skilled craft-centered training facility, which will significantly increase the number of welding bays on-site from the current count of forty-nine.

Along the same lines, BRCC and RPCC recently entered into a partnership for welding and scaffolding programs. While BRCC handles the funding for this program, the RPCC campus houses and delivers the training. The scaffolding curriculum is based on input from five local scaffolding companies, and has been approved as an Industry Based Certification by the WIC. This cooperative endeavor represents a significant step forward for the region, and provides another venue for much-needed skilled craft training that is geographically advantageous for employers.

Another notable program in terms of training opportunity expansion is OLOL's two-semester BSN program, in which registered nurses with associate's degrees can earn a bachelor's degree quickly. This is significant due to a landmark 2010 report by the Institute of Medicine entitled *The Future of Nursing*⁵, which included the recommendation that a full 80 percent of all registered nurses achieve their bachelor's degree by 2020. According to the Louisiana Center for Nursing, regional healthcare institutions plan on complying with this recommendation. Aside from allowing local nurses to meet a new industry standard, achieving a BSN enables those individuals to take on leadership roles in the workplace. The creation of programs such as OLOL's two-semester BSN pathway, which addresses an industry-specific shift, is vital to maintaining a robust workforce.

Public-Private and Employer-Trainer Partnerships

Cooperation among various stakeholders is a vital part of ensuring the workforce created by schools and training institutions is reflective of the needs of the regional business community.

Recently, BRCC and ExxonMobil have partnered with several local contractors to create the North Baton Rouge Industrial Training Initiative (NBRITI), which provides local compressed and scalable training for pipefitting, welding, and electrical work. Partners include Formosa Plastics, ISC, Turner Industries, Performance Contractors, Jacobs Engineering, Pala Group, Triad, Brock Group, Georgia Pacific, and Stupp Corporation. This free, local initiative not only provides technical training knowledge, but also soft skills such as resume building and interview techniques. Public-private initiatives such as this give every member of the community the opportunity to achieve a high-demand/high-wage occupation. This additional training and life-coaching is vital to the program, as NBRITI managers noted that a significant number of participants in the original cohort were unable to complete the training due to volatility in their personal lives and a lack of soft-skills.

Another great example of public-private partnership is the business-run training provider ABC and BRCC joining to create an accelerated summer program. This program allows high school graduates or any adults to, free of charge, receive either NCCER levels one and two training for pipefitting or electrical work, or American Welding Society training for welding through ABC-led programs. This accelerated certification process is funded by BRCC and open enrollment, which – like NBRITI – opens the opportunity for high-demand, high-wage employment to those who may not otherwise have the means to enroll in skilled craft training. Although the program is ongoing, by all accounts it has been a great success so far.

As is the case with skilled craft work, employer-trainer partnerships for professional services occupations have also had a positive impact on the regional workforce. An example is the ongoing LSU-IBM partnership. In order to encourage IBM to expand to the Capital Region, LSU pledged to double the number of computer science faculty and triple the number of computer science graduates before 2020; in addition, LED's FastStart program

was tapped to lead recruitment efforts for IBM while LSU was training future potential employees. In exchange, IBM worked closely with LSU faculty to ensure its curriculum was cutting edge, and assisted the school in adding new majors that would help its graduates compete in a fast-shifting technological landscape. While these steps will certainly help IBM, as some graduates will work for the company, it also aids all computer science majors at LSU and any businesses looking to hire computer science majors in the Capital Region. Partnerships like this are true win-wins for businesses with a local presence and the community as a whole.

Other Non-Traditional Partnerships

Employers of all sizes and industries have leveraged BRAC’s Talent Development Program to help identify and recruit mid- to executive-level professionals. Additional services available through BRAC’s Talent Development Program include orientation and assimilation programs that complement employers’ existing recruitment practices.

Meaningful Outreach to the Community

An often overlooked part of developing a strong workforce is outreach that creates an awareness of workforce needs in the community. Specifically, highlighting high-wage occupations to groups that are not traditionally represented in various industries is an effective way of promoting a robust, diverse regional workforce.

The need to expand awareness about opportunities in healthcare was a chief topic at the Nursing Workforce Diversity Think Tank, which took place in August 2015. This event was organized by the Louisiana Action Coalition, an organization devoted to transforming healthcare in the state through nursing. The goal of the event, which was attended by seventy-five to one hundred thought leaders from

The Tech Sector

A Closer Look

The NKF study cited in this report’s overview listed computer-related companies as a target industry for regional growth, which would lead to increased demand for technology-based careers. Although the 2015 state projections for openings in these occupations were modest when compared to job projections in other industries, the data on actual job openings currently available in the tech sector confirms that this sector continues to show strong promise. In many cases, LWC’s Star Jobs website lists significantly more current openings for these professions than the occupations were projected to experience for the entire year. This type of data discrepancy is explored further in the “Best Practices Going Forward” section of the report.

Job Title	Total Projected Openings, 2015	August 2015 Openings*
Computer Systems Analyst	70	90
Computer and Information Systems Manager	10	13
Computer Programmer	50	113
Network and Computer Systems Administrator	30	45
Network Architect	10	6
Software Development, Systems	40	21
Software Development, Applications	10	82

*Current openings listed on LWC’s Star Jobs website as of August 2015

across the state, is to broaden the demographics of those in the fields of nursing education, practice, and leadership. By working to demonstrate the appeal of the profession to demographic groups historically unrepresented in nursing, the think tank aims to increase the size and change the shape of the healthcare workforce in the Capital Region. Efforts such as this can and should be replicated in many other industries and occupations.

Another example of highly effective outreach programs are LSU's Residential Engineering Camps. These programs allow tenth, eleventh, and twelfth graders to experiment, build, code, and design in various engineering disciplines over the summer. Beyond giving students a small feel of what college life is like through living on-campus, the camp engages students in interesting activities such as building apps for smartphones and participating in robotics competitions. These camps offer need-based scholarships, and focus outreach toward multicultural and female students, in an explicit attempt to engage communities currently underrepresented in engineering. With many students entering college without a declared major, programs like this allow the College of Engineering to make an impression with potential students while they are still in high school.

State Training Programs

There are several programs through which the state government offers assistance to individuals looking for training to achieve employment, as well as businesses looking to train existing employees to fill high-demand occupations. The local Workforce Investment Board (WIB) has a Business and Career Solutions Center that not only assists individuals, but also employers. For individuals, there are many apprenticeship opportunities available through qualified training providers; locally, that includes ABC, ExxonMobil, and unions for all manner of skilled craft work. In addition, they offer training scholarships for high-demand occupations, job readiness courses, and other instruction in soft skills concerning how to obtain and keep a job. While WIB opportunities are open to any unemployed or underemployed individual, some programs have a particular focus on dislocated individuals and military veterans.

One option the local WIB provides is on-the-job (OTJ) training. Essentially, unemployed or under-employed individuals are eligible for this program, in which employers of high-demand, high-wage occupations may receive up to a 50 percent reimbursement for OTJ training of new employees for up to six months. Generally the maximum funding per employee is \$4,000.

On the employer side, the Louisiana Workforce Commission (LWC) offers two grants for training current employees for new tasks or occupations – the Incumbent Worker Training Program (IWTP) and Small Business Employee Training Program (SBET). The SBET is meant for businesses of fifty or fewer employees looking to provide standardized, off-the-shelf training to existing employees in order to increase the workers' skill set to meet a specific need. The process is much more streamlined than the IWTP program, in part because of the standardized nature of the training, along with the \$3,000 cap on reimbursement per trainee per fiscal year.

The IWTP differs from the SBET in several ways, namely that it is available to employers of any size, the training may be customized, and there is no per-employee training cost cap. In addition, if an employer has fewer than fifteen trainees, they must form a consortium with another employer to create a class of at least fifteen trainees. Over \$7 million in IWTP grants have been spent on workforce training through LSU, BRCC, and RPCC since 2012.

While the IWTP may seem more desirable because of the flexibility in training topics and dollars available, there are tradeoffs to these advantages – namely time and bureaucratic steps. Because of the standardized nature of SBET, the application process is expedient, a quality many small businesses would find advantageous. Because of the fluid, individualized nature of many IWTP applications, the LWC has an obligation to perform a more sophisticated due diligence, which includes comparing the requested grant amount per trainee to similar IWTPs that LWC has funded in the past.

In addition, there is a negotiation process between the employer, training provider, and LWC that is not present in the SBET program. Some employers report that the bureaucratic nature of the IWTP application process, combined with its intensive reporting requirements, restrict small and mid-sized businesses from taking advantage of the program. Local stakeholders should track the difficulties in obtaining these grants, and advocate enacting policies that will ease access to IWTP funds.

The IWTP process is imperfect for many customized training needs because it does not move at the speed of commerce. For example, if an organization is forced to transition to new software that will require training of a number of employees, waiting for IWTP approval before allowing an LCTCS institution to formulate a curriculum could take months. Such a delay in implementation may exact a high toll both financially and in terms of expediency. However, the goal of both IWTP and SBET – mitigating potential job loss and aiding business expansion through improving the skills of incumbent employees – makes each program a valuable part of maintaining a robust, modern workforce in the Capital Region.

Best Practices Going Forward

While local training institutions and state and local government bodies have made great strides in working toward a robust workforce that meets the region's labor needs, there are a number of important practices that can be undertaken to ensure the projected openings in high-demand/high-wage jobs are filled. In particular, Baton Rouge Area stakeholders would be well-served to:

- » use a marketing push to destigmatize careers requiring an associate's degree or less,
- » build employer-trainer partnerships, such as customized training, to guarantee the local workforce can adapt as the skills needed for certain occupations shift, and
- » better track data involving projected region-wide occupational demand, workforce output, and actual demand relating to the local workforce.

Destigmatizing Certain High-Demand/High-Wage Jobs

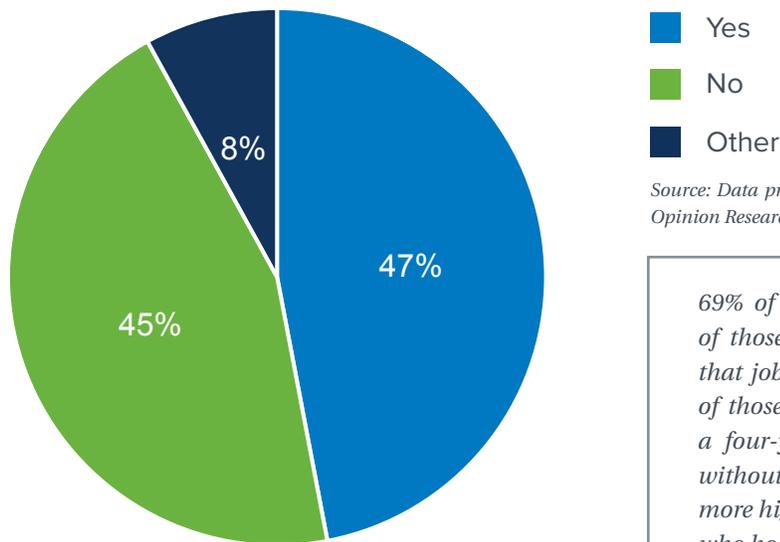
While obtaining a four-year bachelor's degree is a significant accomplishment, and may open doors to many professions important to the regional economy, two-year degrees and shorter-term training also offer a pathway to strong economic and career prospects. Both regional employers and training providers agree that high school students are strongly encouraged to pursue four-year degrees, and that there is a stigma attached to occupations that require two-year degrees and shorter-term education and training programs. This stigmatization is reinforced by policies of both state and federal bodies, which is confounding when one considers the shortage of skilled craft workers both locally and nationally.

On the state level, the Louisiana Board of Regents only counts students achieving associate’s degrees at LCTCS institutions as “completers.” Since Board of Regents institutions are funded based on number of completers, this discourages LCTCS institutions from offering and promoting certificate and NCCER programs. Considering that many of the high-demand/high-wage jobs require only NCCER level completions – as well as the fact that the immediacy of the demand can make a two-year degree impractical – the state Board of Regents should change this policy.

Federally, the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) refuses to provide Pell Grants for non-credit hour or short-term training, which LCTCS is actively lobbying to change. While the LWC has advocated for changes locally to ensure that some skilled craft training, specifically construction training, meet current Pell Grant criteria, a real change in policy is needed at the federal level. By refusing to offer this form of student aid for these types of programs, the DOE is clearly signaling that the individuals are not students, and that these programs are not valuable, further stigmatizing the programs. At a time when the federal government is calling for a massive overhaul of infrastructure nationally, it is perplexing that the DOE, an executive branch agency, is creating a disincentive for individuals to gain the skills to build that infrastructure.

This institutionalized stigma extends to regional residents as well. The Louisiana Workforce Education Initiative (LWEI) is a non-profit whose goal is to perform outreach to students and families, letting them know that good careers exist for those who do not attend four-year colleges and universities. Recently, LWEI conducted a survey to track attitudes toward careers that do not require four-year degrees⁶. A plurality of survey respondents, including a majority of those with less than a high school education and the unemployed, said that a four-year degree offers “better” jobs than other training or a technical degree. In particular, respondents said they preferred four-year degrees because of assumed better opportunities and better pay. While these sentiments may be true in some cases, the results demonstrate a clear need to better educate parents, teachers, students, and other influencers on the advantages and availability of high-wage skilled labor positions, whose salaries rival those of four-year degree occupations according to state projections.

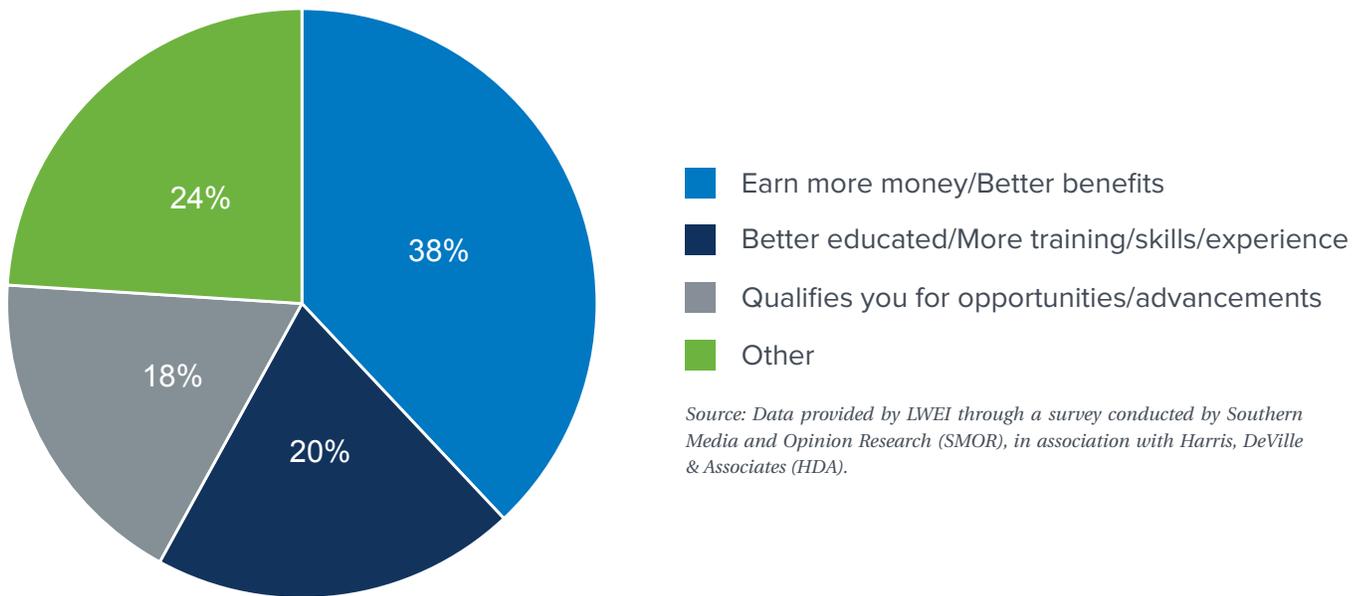
Are jobs that require four-year college degrees better than jobs that do not?



Source: Data provided by LWEI through a survey conducted by Southern Media and Opinion Research (SMOR), in association with Harris, DeVille & Associates (HDA).

69% of those without a high school diploma, and 65% of those unemployed at the time of the survey believed that jobs requiring a four-year degree are superior • 54% of those with a college degree said that jobs that require a four-year degree are not intrinsically better • Those without four-year degrees or present employment think more highly of the opportunity the degrees offer than those who hold the degree

People that view four-year degrees as superior believe they offer higher salaries, better experience, and more upward mobility in the workplace



Fortunately, on the high school level, positive steps are being made to destigmatize two-year and shorter-term programs, specifically with skilled craft work. The best example of this is the Louisiana Department of Education’s (LDOE) Jump Start program, in which high school students take career courses and gain work experience, ultimately earning both a high school diploma and certifications likely to lead to high-wage jobs after graduation. The program is available to both students seeking a career diploma, as well as those seeking a university-preparatory diploma. Many of the Baton Rouge Area’s high-demand/high-wage skilled craft occupations are among the LDOE’s identified statewide career pathways, such as welding, electrical work, pipefitting, carpentry, and more. In addition, a regional Jump Start committee identifies high-demand occupations specific to the area, allowing the program to adapt to the Capital Region’s workforce needs. By not only offering this training in school, but also by actively encouraging students to participate, local high schools are working to end the stigma against non-degree jobs.

In addition, the Louisiana Department of Education has created an incentive for schools by offering accountability incentive points and funding based on Jump Start career education outcomes. Essentially, schools receive equivalent incentive points whether a student receives a basic statewide Jump Start credential or an Advanced Placement college credit, or an advanced Jump Start credential and an Advanced Placement score of three or higher. By creating a true parallel in terms of school incentives between career coursework and college-preparatory coursework, the WIC has taken a major step in softening the stigma against skilled craft training and occupations.

Beyond Jump Start, “I Can Do That!,” a program currently in development by the Lafayette WIB for area schools, is a best practice that the Baton Rouge Area should embrace in its efforts to encourage entry into skilled craft work. The program consists of a series of videos taken in various industrial facilities and machine shops, and includes

the testimonials of current employees about a) the value of their work and the personal fulfillment they receive from their career; b) the important role high school education plays in their jobs; and c) the good conditions in which they work, and high caliber of their coworkers. While these testimonials and facility tours are on-screen, informational text – including salary information – is on the bottom of the screen. These videos serve to dismiss the idea that skilled craft labor is generally transient or takes place in poor working conditions.

While the Lafayette WIB's decision to show these videos to middle school students is effective, the truly inspired part of the program is that middle schools show the videos to parents. Many times the stigma against non-degree careers begins at home, with parents insisting that “good jobs” only originate from four-year degrees – something evidenced in the LWEI study cited earlier in this section. By demonstrating to parents that high-wage occupations with great working conditions are available in skilled craft work or other certificate/training programs, Lafayette schools are changing the way careers are discussed in their region.

Pursuing More Employer-Trainer and Public-Private Partnerships

Based on the success of public-private and employer-trainer partnerships mentioned in the “Recent Progress” section of this report, it is imperative that training institutions and private businesses work collaboratively in order to maintain and improve the region's workforce competitiveness.

While generalized programs such as the NBRITI or those available through SBET are helpful, many businesses require individualized training as industries change or new projects and contracts are acquired. Too many businesses rely on IWTP grants to provide this training; while IWTP is a valuable resource, the process of obtaining approval is time-consuming, and the path is fraught with bureaucratic speedbumps and limitations.

In many cases, it will be advantageous for regional businesses to forego state grants and the drawn out process and restrictions that accompany them. One highly promising alternative is customized training through LCTCS institutions, based in part on the state's FastStart program. FastStart provides turnkey workforce solutions as a free incentive for new or expanding facilities to the state. The statewide FastStart program has received recognition not just for the quality of the training provided, but also the speed at which it is successfully completed. Unlike FastStart, which is limited to new and expanding businesses, this training would be available to all regional businesses for a fee. Another plus of the program is that one of the two local WIBs is working on a program in which it will fund up to 50 percent of these LCTCS customized training programs in a process much more expedient and less competitive than the IWTP process.

This program would allow for significant flexibility in terms of the content of the curriculum and the speed at which it is developed. In addition, this training would not be limited to incumbent employees, but also available to new or potential hires that would not qualify as trainees under IWTP. In the event that a specific training program proves to be too costly, businesses have the ability to form consortiums and pool resources in order to drive down the total cost. Customized training free of the rigidity of the IWTP process would allow the Capital Region's workforce to adapt to changing business conditions rapidly and nimbly.

An out-of-state example of this type of customized training is in the state of Washington. In the Washington Customized Training Program (CTP), the state board of community and technical colleges pays the upfront cost of customized training. After the training is completed, the private business pays a portion of the costs, with the

remainder spread across a set amount of time. While such a funding scheme may not be feasible considering the budget constraints in Louisiana, it is an example of businesses in other states realizing the value of autonomy in customized training partnerships with state providers.

Another area in which an employer-trainer partnership would be advantageous concerns registered nursing. While regional schools are producing over four hundred registered nurses per year, nearly 40 percent of those graduates have received their associate's degree rather than their BSN, and the percentage of non-BSN registered nurses is even greater among those who have been in the profession for several years.

In light of the Institute of Medicine's recommendation that 80 percent of all registered nurses obtain their BSN by 2020, there will be a need for more than 20 percent of current and graduating registered nurses in the region return to school and earn their bachelor's degree. While OLOL provides such a program, a formal partnership between the schools of nursing at OLOL and/or SU and current employers of registered nurses with associate's degrees would ease this transition. This sort of partnership would increase accessibility and decrease the cost for members of the workforce seeking to meet new industry standards. Such a partnership would benefit all stakeholders – employer, employee, and training provider – while keeping the area's nursing workforce current with evolving industry standards.

Use of Data in Workforce Analysis

While performing a qualitative analysis of local workforce needs and the steps taken to meet them is beneficial, ideally such an endeavor would be accompanied by a robust quantitative analysis. A quantitative analysis would show gaps where training output does not meet projected demand, as well as surpluses, where output of trainees exceeds what the area presently needs among its workforce. However, due to the present methods of tracking non-degree/NCCER trainees – as well as a significant discrepancy between the state's projected workforce demand, school and training institution output, and actual demand as described by local businesses – such an analysis has proven challenging.

Tracking of Non-Degree/NCCER Trainees

Because LCTCS institutions and ABC only provide number of NCCER courses completed overall rather than the number of individuals completing NCCER courses, it is difficult to quantify the output for skilled craft trainees. In terms of ABC, because (outside of welding) all graduates complete all four NCCER training levels, it is possible to determine an approximate count for programs such as electrical work, pipefitting, HVAC, and others. However, if any individual completed two programs, there would be the risk of double counting, when only one person is actually entering the workforce. In addition, many welders do not have a four-level completion path, so it is impossible to tell whether this year's 770 welding level completions at ABC consist of 770 individuals completing one level, 190 individuals completing all four levels, or something between these two poles.

This welding issue is a problem across the board for NCCER training at LCTCS institutions, which also track only NCCER level completions, not which or how many students have completed levels in each craft⁷. This problem with determining the output of trained welders at ABC exists for all NCCER training at BRCC and RPCC. Among individuals that did not pursue degrees in skilled crafts, there is no way to tell precisely how many were trained. In addition, there is uncertainty as to whether procedures set in place by NCCER have been strictly followed by

BRCC, raising questions about skilled craft credentials from the institution generally. BRCC has since undertaken an internal audit, working with NCCER to address the potential procedural issues.

The easiest solution to this challenge would be to track training by student either in conjunction with or instead of simply tracking level completions. This data would be valuable not only for reports attempting to quantify workforce output by occupation, but also institutionally for BRCC, RPCC, and ABC course planning. In terms of the LCTCS institutions, this tracking issue could also be solved by the Board of Regents counting non-degree students as completers, which would require schools to track completions by individuals rather than simply level completions. As ABC is a private training provider, they set their own policies and any decision to make this change in record-keeping must be made internally.

Addressing the Discrepancy between Projected Demand, Output, and Actual Demand

Each year, the WIC approves regional projections concerning industry and occupational growth, as recommended by the Occupational Forecasting Conference, based on collaborative work between an LSU analysis team and the LWC Research and Statistics team. These projections include the number of openings expected per occupation, wage range, degree-level or certification needed, and other information relevant to the occupation. BRAC undertook this report as an effort to determine the occupations in highest demand through the projections, to compare the number of projected openings in these occupations to the output in the same year by local colleges and training institutions, and to quantify any labor gaps apparent through this comparison.

However, in many high-demand occupations – most significantly in skilled craft positions – this comparison seemed to indicate some areas of significant surpluses. This conclusion runs counter to informal reporting and surveys received from area business leaders, who insist there are large labor shortages in occupations such as electrical work, pipefitting, and welding – shortages that have driven the average salary for these occupations twice as high as the state projections. In fact, some area welders are making upwards of \$300,000 per year, while the WIC projected the average welding salary to be under \$45,000 annually for 2015.

The most glaring discrepancy between projected demand, output, and actual demand is in welding. According to employers, it is the skill in greatest demand regionally, and wages for capable welders have grown tremendously. The WIC projected that in 2015 that there would be a need for 210 new welders locally. While tracking practices at ABC and LCTCS make it impossible to get a precise count of welders trained in 2014, the most conservative number based on information provided is 540 welders trained by BRCC, RPCC, and ABC – over 250 percent of projected demand – and yet a reported demand still exists. There is a clear breakdown between these supply and demand estimates.

There are several potential causes for the discrepancy between the projected surplus and the real-world shortfall:

- » **Crossing regional boundaries** – if there are better paying jobs, full-time employment rather than contract work, or a more desirable locale, migration by those recently trained in the Capital Region may account for some of the discrepancy.
- » **Insufficient Crosswalk** – the state has a “crosswalk” that it uses to determine which training programs correspond to which occupations, which allows one to determine into which jobs graduates of programs

may go. There is a possibility that the current crosswalk insufficiently lists the types of careers skilled craft trainees may enter. For example, it lists welding as the only career for an individual with “Welders, Cutters, Solderers, and Brazers” training; if this training qualifies trainees for other careers, the crosswalk should account for that.

- » **Insufficient Data for Projections** – the LWC projections are based, in part, on staffing-pattern surveys that local businesses complete and return to LSU for analysis. These included only full-time employee needs, not contract or project-based employees, which may account for many area openings.
- » **Trainees are Unemployable** – some local companies are only able to hire 30 percent of skilled laborers that they interview for a range of reasons, from a lack of job skills despite completing a training program to a lack of soft skills and an inability to pass drug screenings, among others.

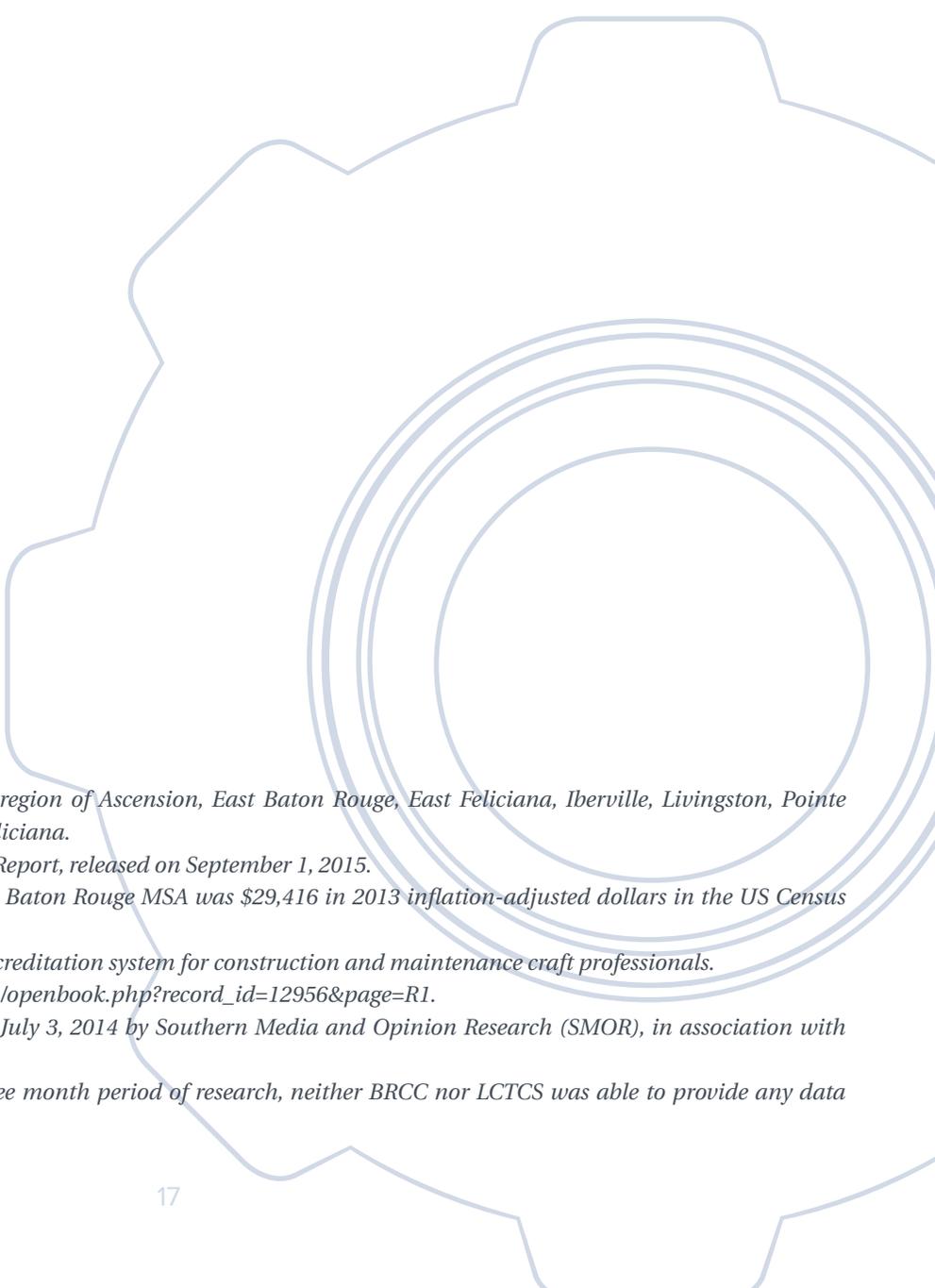
It is unclear whether these factors account for the entire discrepancy between projected demand, output, and actual demand, but regardless, the disconnect is something that must be addressed. The best solution would be for all stakeholders – LSU, LWC, local business, schools and training providers, economic development organizations, and the area WIB – to work more collaboratively and transparently. This may include greater participation by local businesses and economic development organizations such as BRAC in providing occupational needs numbers to LSU, a more in-depth review of annual projections before approval, an in-depth look at how many applicants are disqualified for non-skill-related reasons, or other similar measures. A great example of stakeholders coming together in this way is the Craft Workforce Development Task Force released a comprehensive report calling for reforms that have been vital to the region’s skilled craft workforce development, such as Jump Start, movement toward using Pell Grants for skilled craft work, and other best practices cited in this report⁸.

Conclusion

Qualitatively, local businesses, schools, and training providers have undertaken great steps to ensure the local workforce will meet the demand for projected high-demand/high-wage jobs in the short-term. Programs like Jump Start ensure that secondary students realize the importance of and career potential in skilled craft labor, and employer–trainer partnerships like NBRITI and LSU-IBM have shown how businesses with a regional presence can help create a pipeline of individuals that not only strengthen their own workforce, but that of the region overall. In addition to these steps, programs like “I Can Do That!” that promote skilled craft work to middle school students and their parents, as well as even more public-private partnerships, will only serve to guarantee that the Capital Region continues to grow a well-rounded workforce with the ability to adapt when necessary.

Quantitatively, there is work to do. Skilled craft labor is high-demand not only in the Baton Rouge Area, but also across South Louisiana and nationally. Insufficient systems of tracking trainee output for these occupations make it difficult to accurately assess the workforce situation in the region. In addition, discrepancies between state occupational projections, approximate output numbers from training providers and schools, and employer needs indicates a disconnect between the three that make an accurate assessment of workforce gaps impractical.

Overall, stakeholders in the region have recognized the areas of the local workforce that need the most attention, and have responded accordingly. Going forward, it would be advisable to continue workforce programs that have shown promise, replicate those that appear to be successful in other regions, and clarify the numbers behind our workforce situation.



References

¹The Baton Rouge Area refers to the nine-parish region of Ascension, East Baton Rouge, East Feliciana, Iberville, Livingston, Pointe Coupee, St. Helena, West Baton Rouge, and West Feliciana.

²Based on Louisiana Workforce Commission's July Report, released on September 1, 2015.

³The median nonfamily household income for the Baton Rouge MSA was \$29,416 in 2013 inflation-adjusted dollars in the US Census Bureau's latest survey.

⁴NCCER certification is a nationally-recognized accreditation system for construction and maintenance craft professionals.

⁵The full report is available at http://books.nap.edu/openbook.php?record_id=12956&page=R1.

⁶The LWEI survey was conducted from June 24 to July 3, 2014 by Southern Media and Opinion Research (SMOR), in association with Harris, DeVillie & Associates (HDA).

⁷This data may exist in some form, but over a three month period of research, neither BRCC nor LCTCS was able to provide any data except level completions.