

UNION APPRENTICESHIPS EQUAL BACHELOR'S DEGREES

Registered apprenticeships are training programs in which participants get the opportunity to “earn while they learn” with tuition costs covered by joint labor-management organizations or employers, who gain access to a pool of skilled, productive, and safe workers. Apprenticeship training is particularly important to the construction industry.

Joint labor-management, or union, apprenticeship programs account for the vast majority of registered apprentices in Illinois’ construction industry.

- Joint labor-management programs are cooperatively administered and have standards, wages, and “cents per hour” contributions that are negotiated privately between contractors and unions.
- In Illinois, 97% of all construction apprentices are enrolled in union programs.
- Union programs enroll 98% of all women, 99% of all Black apprentices, and 98% of all Latinx apprentices.

Union programs in construction deliver training hours, completion rates, and diversity outcomes that far exceed employer-only (or nonunion) programs and compare favorably to universities.

- Union programs require 27% more hours of training (7,306 hours) than four-year universities (5,760 hours).
- Union programs have a 54% completion rate while nonunion programs record a low completion rate of 31%.
- Graduation rates are 61% at public universities, 66% at nonprofit universities, and 43% at for-profit universities.
- The racial diversity of graduates from joint construction programs is similar to Illinois’ public universities.

Union apprenticeship programs deliver good middle-class careers for Illinois workers.

- The average union journeyworker earns over \$40 per hour, significantly more than the comparable exit wage from nonunion construction programs (\$23 per hour).
- A union journeyworker earns about as much over a career (\$2.4 million) as a worker with a bachelor’s degree (\$2.5 million, after student debt).

The social outcomes of union construction workers are also similar to workers with college degrees.

- 4% of union construction workers are in poverty, 4% rely on Medicaid, and 60% are married.
- 10% of nonunion construction workers live in poverty, 10% rely on Medicaid, and 48% are married.
- 2% of workers with bachelor’s degrees are in poverty, 3% rely on Medicaid, and 56% are married.

Joint Labor-Management Apprenticeship Programs Are the Gold Standard			Apprenticeships are the Bachelor's Degree of the Construction Industry		
ILEPI	JOINT CONSTRUCTION PROGRAMS	EMPLOYER-ONLY PROGRAMS	ILEPI	JOINT CONSTRUCTION PROGRAMS	PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES
Total Apprentices (2000-2016)	74,500	1,900	Training Requirements	7,300 hours	5,800 hours
Training Requirements	7,300 hours	6,300 hours	Graduation Rate	54%	61%
Completion Rate	54%	31%	African American Graduates	9%	10%
African American Completion	52%	18%	Latinx Graduates	11%	12%
Military Veteran Completion	60%	27%	Lifetime Earnings	\$2.4 million	\$2.5 million (after loans)
Journeyworker Wage	\$40 per hour	\$23 per hour			

Union apprenticeship programs are the bachelor’s degrees of the construction industry, delivering training hours, diversity outcomes, competitive earnings, and positive social outcomes that rival public universities. For young workers, union apprenticeship programs offer excellent alternatives to achieving upward economic mobility.

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The Apprenticeship Alternative: Enrollment, Completion Rates, and Earnings in Registered Apprenticeship Programs in Illinois

Focus Area
Apprenticeship Training