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HCC in the News: Many skipping four-year degree to learn a trade

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TAMPA (FOX 13) - With a mask and torch, Edgar Owens is building experience toward his next chapter as a welder.

"I'm 30 years old. I needed to find something that I could do for a career that I could support myself and possibly a future family and that's why I chose this program," said Owens.

He's about to complete a one-year program at Hillsborough Community College.

"People don't want generally to go to college anymore. They want to find something that they actually want to do, that is going to pay the bills. They're not planning to come out of college with debt," said Owens.

Yadira Jaber just received her degree in nursing after two years of schooling at Hillsborough Community College.

"The fact that I could get into nursing quicker than the four-year degree, I just jumped on it as soon as I possibly could," said Jaber.

Jobs and money in trade professions can be easier to come by.

"People would like to be able to go to school for a couple of years and get out and get in a profession where they are helping people and they have a high likelihood of getting a job right away," explained Leif Penrose, the dean of health sciences at Hillsborough Community College.

"It can go from $11 to $12 an hour all the way up to $40, $50, $60 an hour," said Owens.

Florida Senator Marco Rubio put a spotlight on the vocational versus academic debate during the 2016 presidential campaign.

"Welders, machinists, airplane mechanics, car technicians, these are good-paying jobs. For the life of me, I don’t know why we stopped teaching Americans to do that kind of work, to work with their hands," said Sen. Rubio.

Owens agreed with that.

"You can go anywhere in the nation and get a job. You have benefits that you can almost not get any place else. You can do pretty much anything that you want to do," said Owens.

It's can be a fast-track to a bright future.

"If they come out of programs like this that's a yearlong they have minimal debt or no debt at all and they can immediately get a job and start earning immediately," said Owens.

"I mean, if it's only going to take you two years to finish and get out there, I mean, why not?" said Jaber.

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