More education means higher earnings—for life

A new report from the U.S. Census Bureau underscores the economic value of education: data show that over the course of their working lives, adults are likely to have higher earnings the more educated they are.

As the chart illustrates, high school dropouts have the lowest expected lifetime earnings compared with workers at all other levels of educational attainment. Professional and doctoral degree holders have the highest. And financial gains are predicted at each successive level of schooling completed in between.


Note: Earnings estimates are for full-time, year-round workers and are based on 1997-99 work experience. “Synthetic” work-life earnings estimates are created by using the working population’s 1-year annual earnings and summing their age-specific average earnings for people aged 25 to 64. The resulting totals represent what individuals with the same educational level could expect to earn, on average, in today’s dollars during a hypothetical 40-year working life.