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Skeptical Thoughts to Emerging Minds

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(<http://www.scate.org/>)STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and math) play a direct role in driving economic growth. But as STEM is increasingly heralded as the pathway to success in the job market, the message is often misleading. It is time to differentiate myth from reality regarding STEM jobs in today's economy. Evidence is mounting that not all STEM degrees guarantee employment or lucrative jobs. **To ensure employment in STEM disciplines, students must pursue**

STEM degrees in high-demand fields, not just any STEM degree.

Nearly 30% of Americans with associate degrees now earn more than those with bachelor's degrees, according to Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce. In fact, recent trends in several states show, on average, community college graduates right out of school make more than graduates of universities. Two-year degree programs in the advanced technologies that drive our nation's economy lead to a multitude of well-paying jobs in today's industry. The increase in wages for community college grads is being driven by a high demand for individuals with so-called "middle-skills," which often require no more than an associate degree, such as lab technicians, computer engineers, draftsmen, bio-technicians, machinists, and engineering technicians for all disciplines. Graduates from these programs have substantial STEM skills with less than a bachelor's degree.

The **South Carolina Advanced Technological Education Center** (<http://www.scate.org/>) session at the upcoming NCPN conference—titled *Skeptical Thoughts to Emerging Minds (STEM)*—will begin by dispelling myths about STEM education and how much post-high school education a student really needs to be very successful. Jobs in applied science and technology available to two-year college graduates offer attractive pay with career advancement options. It isn't unusual for technicians to start at \$40,000 and quickly begin earning \$60,000 or more a year. In some specialty areas, highly skilled technicians can earn more than \$100,000 a year.

The Advanced Technological Education (ATE) internship and industry consortium program at Florence-Darlington Technical College helps engineering, industrial, and computer technology students accelerate their pathways to high wages by placing them in year-round, paid internships that are coordinated with their academic schedules. This experience contributes significantly to the students' "workplace readiness" and sets the stage for full-time employment. Program graduates also have options for continuing their education, immediately upon graduation or later, opening up additional avenues for career advancement.

We need to counteract the myth about STEM jobs with more of the truth. The reality is that there is a greater demand for highly skilled *technicians* than for most other STEM jobs. Our students deserve to know the facts and about the breadth of opportunities in STEM in South Carolina and beyond, so they can make better education and career choices that will align with industry needs.

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For more information on the NCPN conference, visit www.ncpn.info (<http://www.ncpn.info>).

BEGINNING OF NEWSLETTER ([index.html](#))

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