

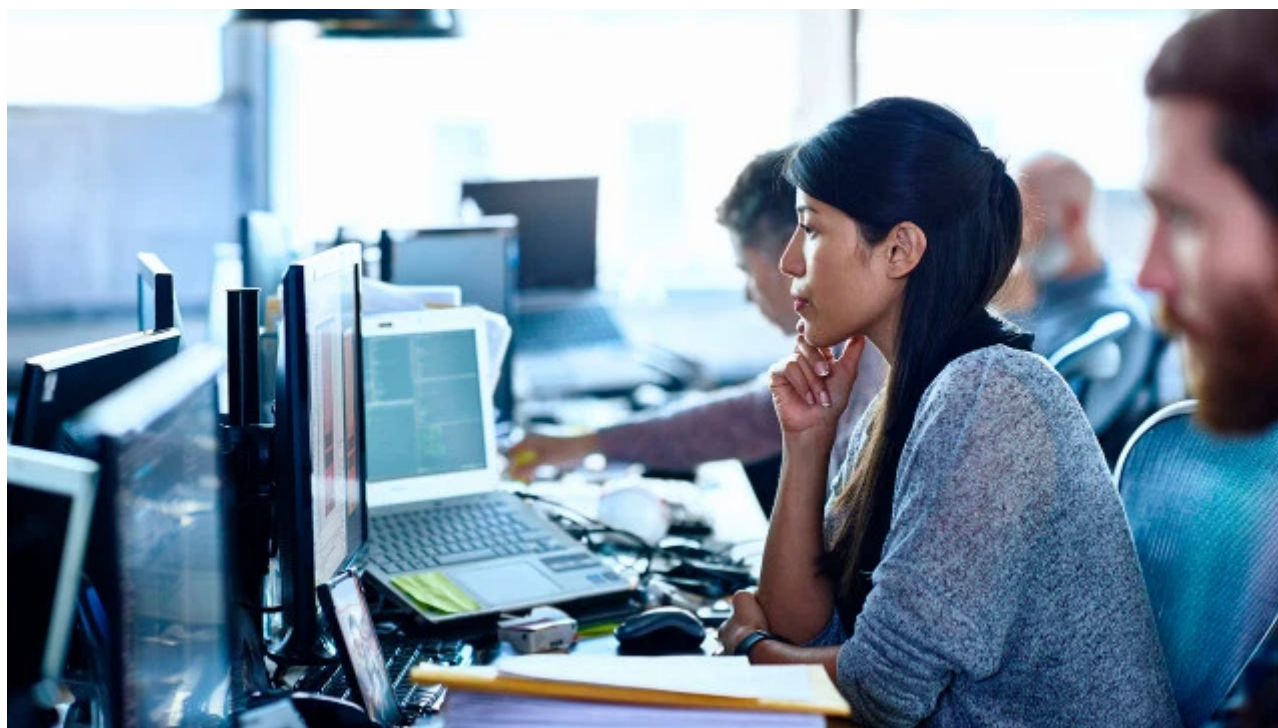
FACTANK

NEWS IN THE NUMBERS

JUNE 20, 2019

U.S. women near milestone in the college-educated labor force

BY RICHARD FRY

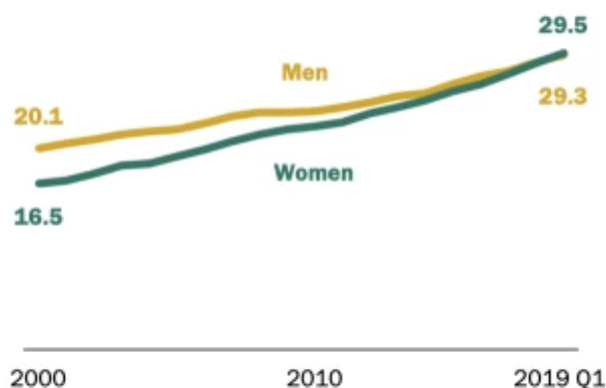


(10'000 Hours via Getty Images)

Women are approaching a milestone in gender parity. 2019 will likely be the first year in which they are a majority of the college-educated labor force. As of the first quarter of 2019, 29.5 million women in the labor force had at least a bachelor's degree, effectively matching the number of college-educated men in the workforce (29.3 million), according to a new Pew Research Center analysis of data from the [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#).

Women are now half of the U.S. college-educated labor force

Labor force ages 25 and older with at least a bachelor's degree (in millions)



Note: Labor force consists of people working or looking for work. First quarter, 2019 estimate not seasonally adjusted.
Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, based on 2000-2019 Current Population Survey.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

This milestone matters for women because educational attainment is highly correlated with income. Women now comprise 50.2% of the college-educated labor force, up from 45.1% in 2000. They **remain less than half** (46.7%) of the overall workforce ages 25 and older.

While women have only recently reached parity with men in the college-educated workforce, they have been a majority of college-educated adults for more than a decade. Women first received more than half of the **bachelor's degrees** awarded in the 1981-82 academic year; today they earn about 57% of bachelor's degrees. The **number of college-educated women** in the adult population (ages 25 and older) surpassed the number of college-educated men in 2007.

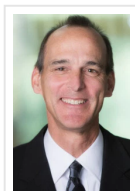
Since there are more college-educated women than men, why has it taken more than 10 years for women to reach parity in the college-educated workforce? One important factor is that college-educated women are less likely than their male counterparts to be in the labor force. In 2018, 69.9% of college-educated women were in the labor force, compared with 78.1% of college-educated men. The number of women with at least a bachelor's degree would have had to significantly outstrip the number of college-educated men to offset this labor force participation difference.

Though women are at parity with men in the overall college-educated labor force, they lag significantly behind in **many specific occupations**. For example, women account for only 25% of college-educated workers in computer occupations and 15% of college-educated workers in engineering occupations. In some other occupations, such as office and administrative support and health care practitioners and technicians, women represent the majority of college-educated workers.

Women's growing representation among the college-educated labor force has important economic implications for individual workers and the economy. **Census Bureau figures** show that the typical worker (ages 25 and older) earned \$41,900 in 2017, but a worker with at least a bachelor's degree earned \$61,300. (The earnings bump associated with a bachelor's degree is larger for men than women. The median earnings of college-educated men is \$74,900, compared with \$50,200 for men overall. The typical college-educated woman earns \$51,600, versus \$36,000 for women overall.) About a third (35%) of U.S. adults 25 and older are college educated, but these individuals generate 57% of the economy's earnings – \$4.7 trillion out of \$8.4 trillion total labor market earnings in 2017.

U.S. women may be far from parity in many facets of society – particularly in **top positions** in business and government – but they are making inroads in the upper echelon of the labor market. The growing number of college-educated women in the labor force translates into greater earning potential for women overall and could eventually contribute to the narrowing of the **gender wage gap**.

Topics: [Educational Attainment](#), [Gender](#), [Business and Labor](#), [Education](#), [Work and Employment](#)



Richard Fry is a senior researcher focusing on economics and education at Pew Research Center.

[POSTS](#) | [BIO](#) | [TWITTER](#) | [EMAIL](#)



MAKE A FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTION TO SUPPORT OUR WORK

[DONATE](#)

RELATED

FACT TANK | SEPTEMBER 1, 2016

10 facts about American workers