What Is Measured?
Average earnings for graduates one year and five years after earning a certificate or degree

Who Is Counted?
All Oklahoma State System students who earned a certificate, associate degree, or bachelor's degree in academic years 2002-03 through 2004-05 or 2006-07 through 2008-09

What It Tells Us
Average earnings after one year for students with all types of degrees remained about the same over time, with those with Associate of Applied Science (A.A.S.) degrees earning the most and those with Associate of Arts/Science (A.A./A.S.) degrees earning the least. In addition, A.A.S. degree-holders earned more than those with bachelor's (B.A./B.S.) degrees one year after college and roughly the same as B.A./B.S.-holders after five years.
Why It's Important
Many students enroll in community colleges to gain new skills so that they can improve their employment prospects. Recent studies have found that median earnings for those with associate degrees are higher than median earnings for high school graduates (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2010). Even among students who do not complete a degree, the average effect of attending a community college is estimated at a 10 percent increase for women and 9 percent for men (Belfield & Bailey, 2011). Fewer studies have examined vocational certificates at the national level, but their results are consistent with the research on associate degrees, with certificate recipients showing a substantial advantage in earnings (Bosworth, 2010).

ABOUT THE DATA
Average salary: Data on graduates were matched with Oklahoma Employment Security Commission (OESC) data. Graduates' average earnings was calculated by multiplying the wages of the last quarter by four. Both part-time and full-time employee wages were included. Students who earned more than one degree are categorized by the last degree earned.

The OESC data include only employees who have Oklahoma unemployment insurance and therefore exclude self-employed workers, federal government employees, and graduates working outside the state. To obtain earnings data for the first two groups, graduates who were not found in the OESC database were matched to data in the Oklahoma Tax Commission records. One limitation of these tax records is that they may represent the wages of a spouse if the graduate filed a joint tax return.

DATA SOURCE
Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education. (n.d.). Average annual salaries of state system graduates employed in Oklahoma one year and five years after graduation.