



TEACHERS COLLEGE, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Community College Occupational Degrees: Are they worth it?

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Occupational higher education

- 98% of certificates, 62% of AA degrees, 60% of BA degrees in career education
- 45% of certificates and 33% of AA degrees in health
- Academic higher education either precedes or is occupational higher education

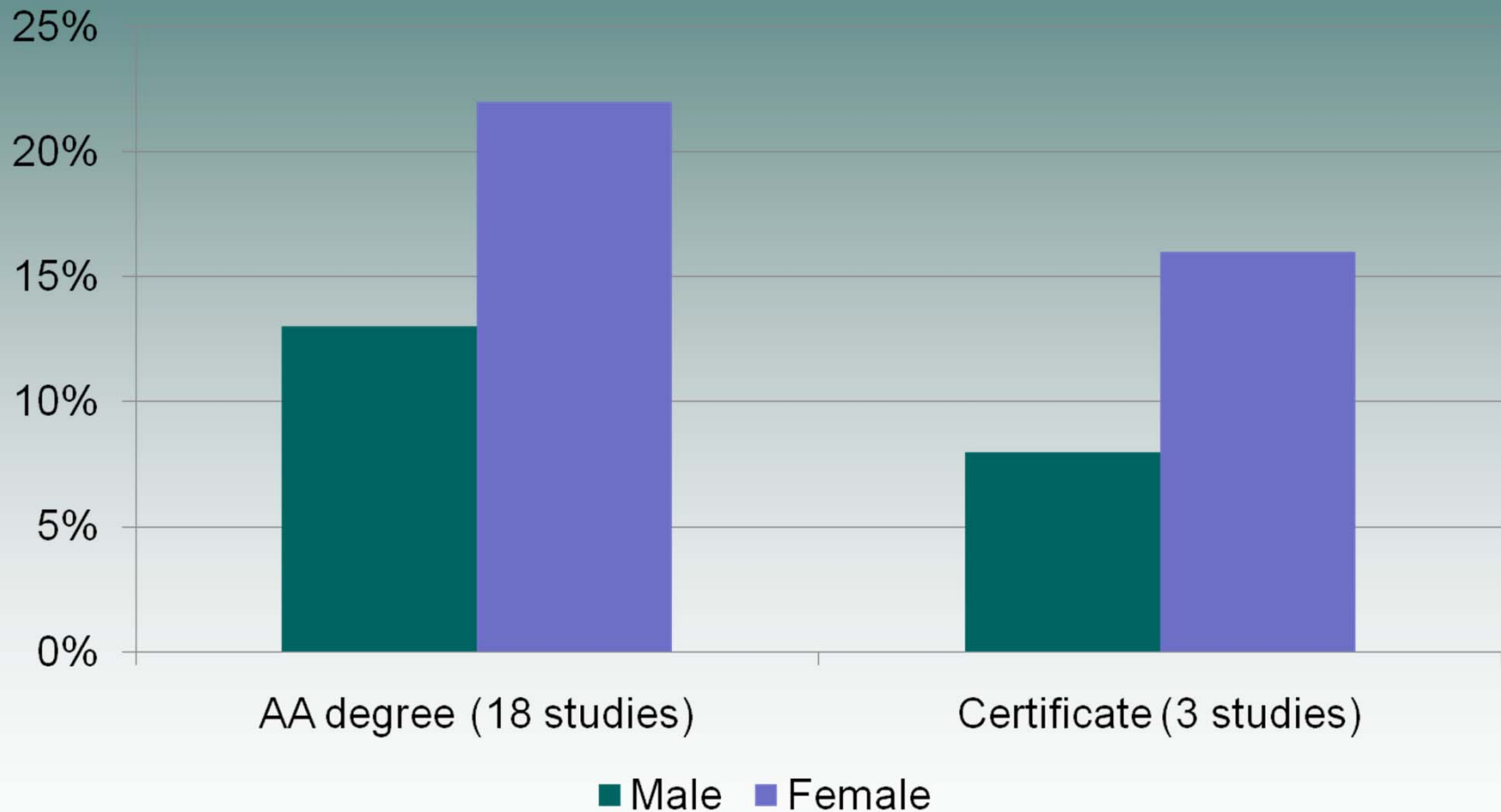
“Many a teacher and author writes and argues in behalf of a cultural and humane education against the encroachments of a specialized practical education, without recognizing that his own education, which he calls liberal, has been mainly training for his own particular calling”

John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (1916, p.313)

Community College Programs

- Academic versus occupational balance is sharpest for CCs:
 - How much academic preparation before career education?
 - How to identify students who would benefit from extended academic preparation?
- Manifest in distribution of certificates, AA degrees, and transfer to BA degrees; range of fields of study
- Certificates are 40% of awards (25% of hours)

Evidence on Earnings Premium



Research Unknowns

- Certificate-holders may not resemble the ‘typical’ student
- Certificates may be shorter, cheaper, more convenient, or linked with job placements
- Graduation is key (returns to completers)
- Certificates may supplement attainment: How do an individual’s credentials all fit together?
- Returns for current cohorts

Labor Market Factors

Demand-side:

- Race between education and technology
- Which is most urgent: cognitive skills or occupational competencies?
- Certificates may be too terminal or not articulated
- Health sector: 40% of 8 million new jobs by 2016

Supply-side:

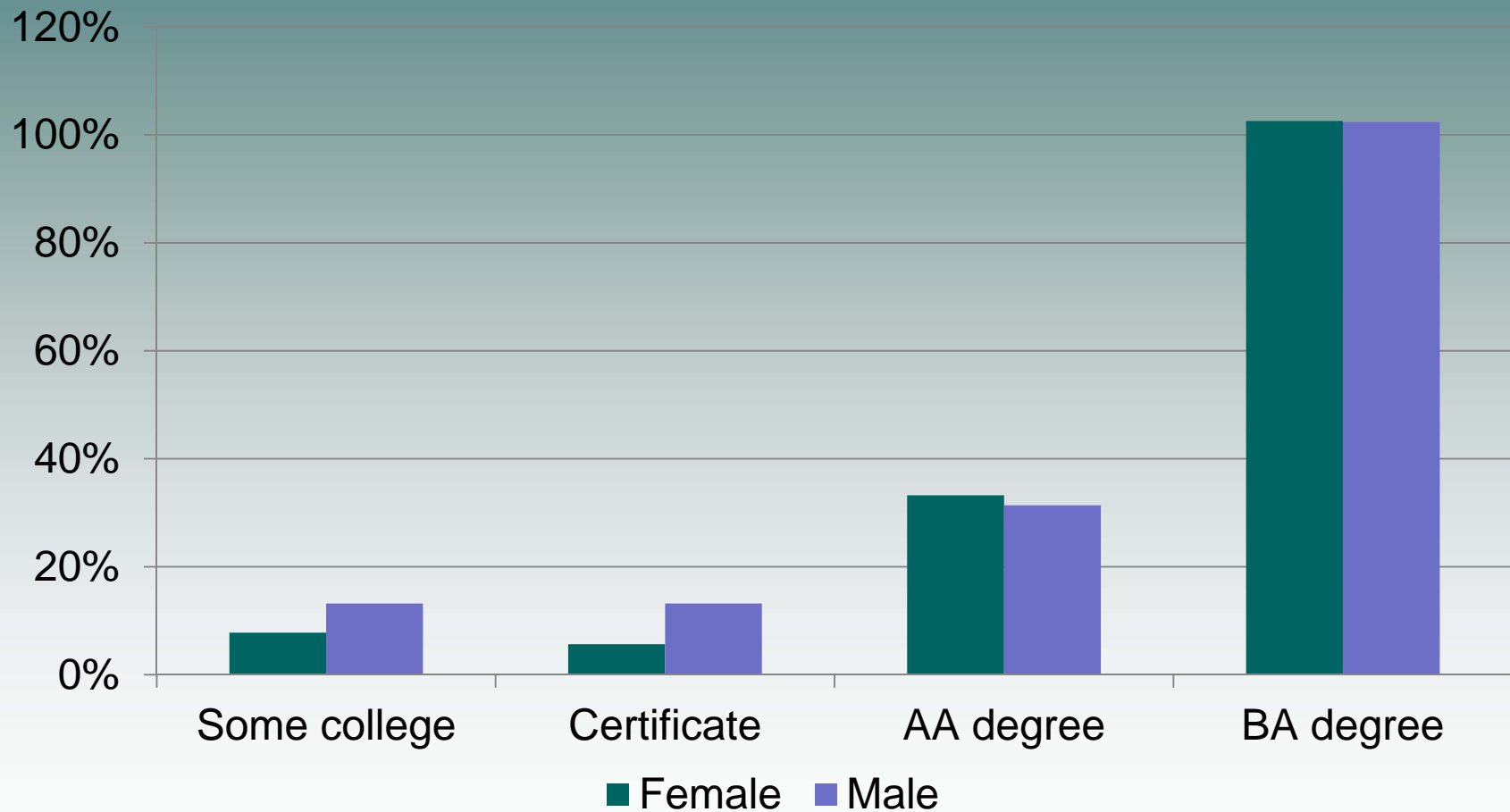
- Competition with for-profits (certificates) and four-year colleges (BA transfers)

Updated Estimates

Using Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) data from 2008, we calculate earnings returns:

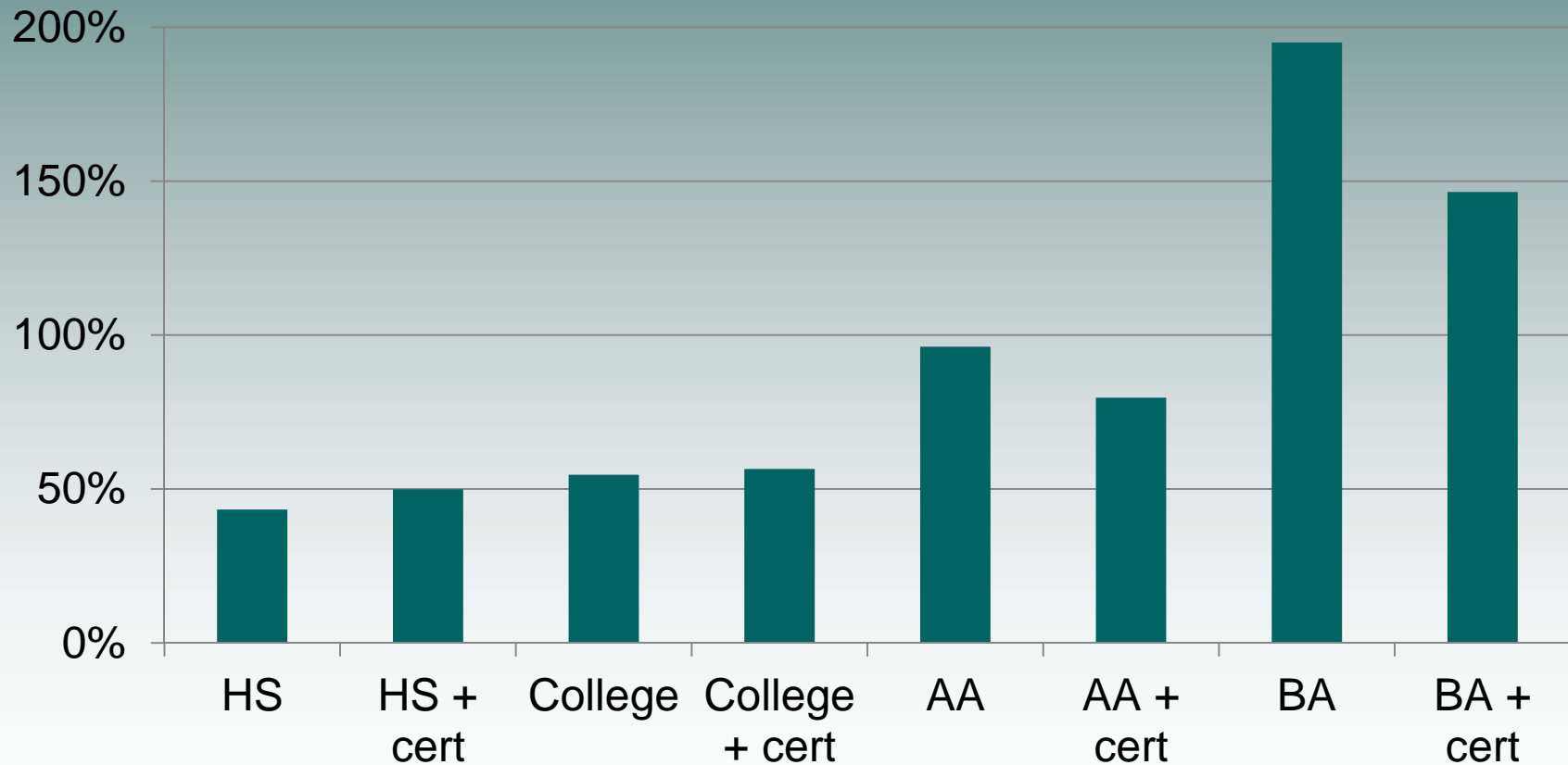
1. Over high school graduate
2. For interaction of certificates with attainment
3. Across academic and career AA degrees
4. By field of study for certificates and AA degrees

1. Earnings Premium over High School Graduate



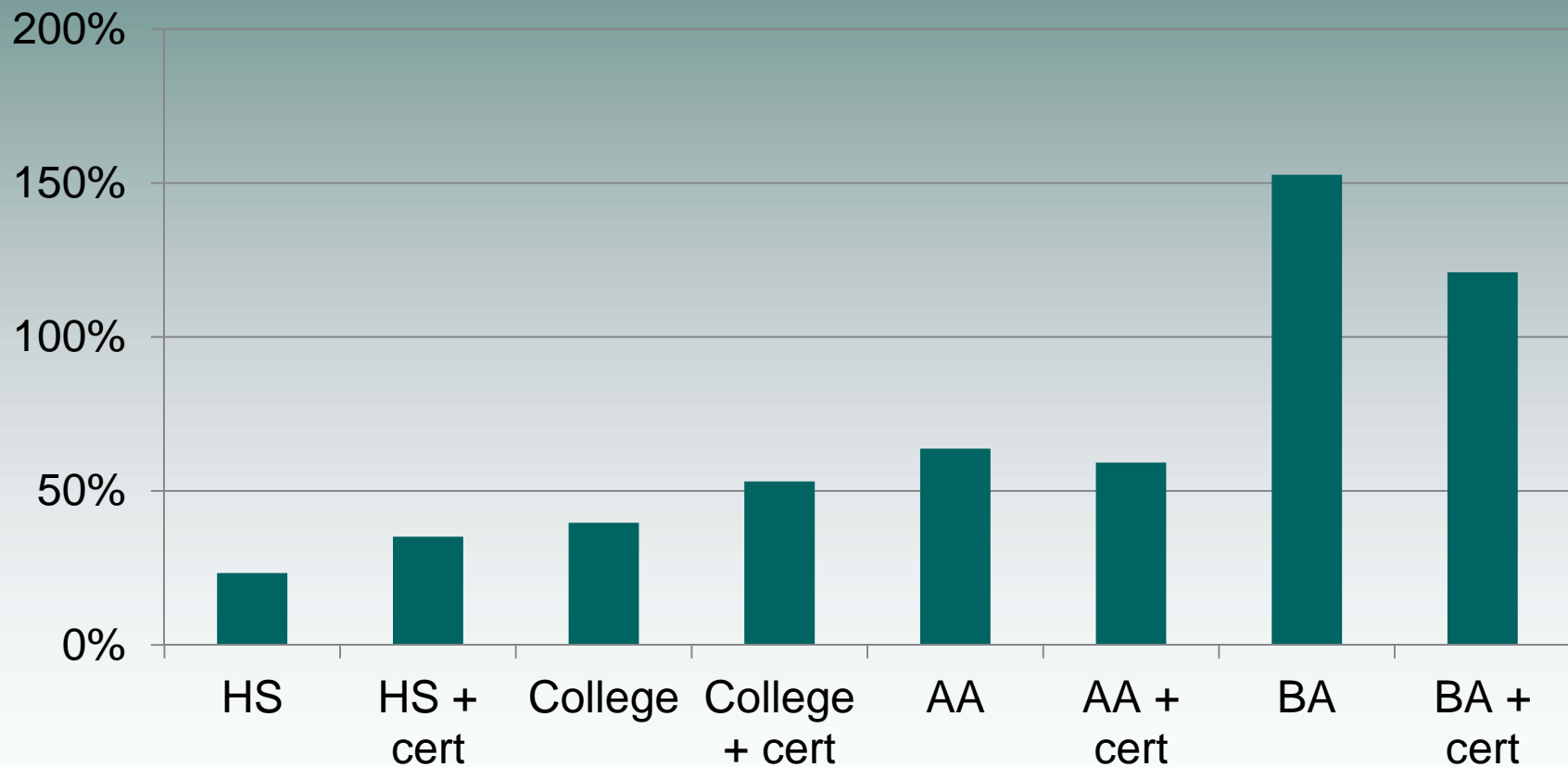
2. Certificates with attainment

Female

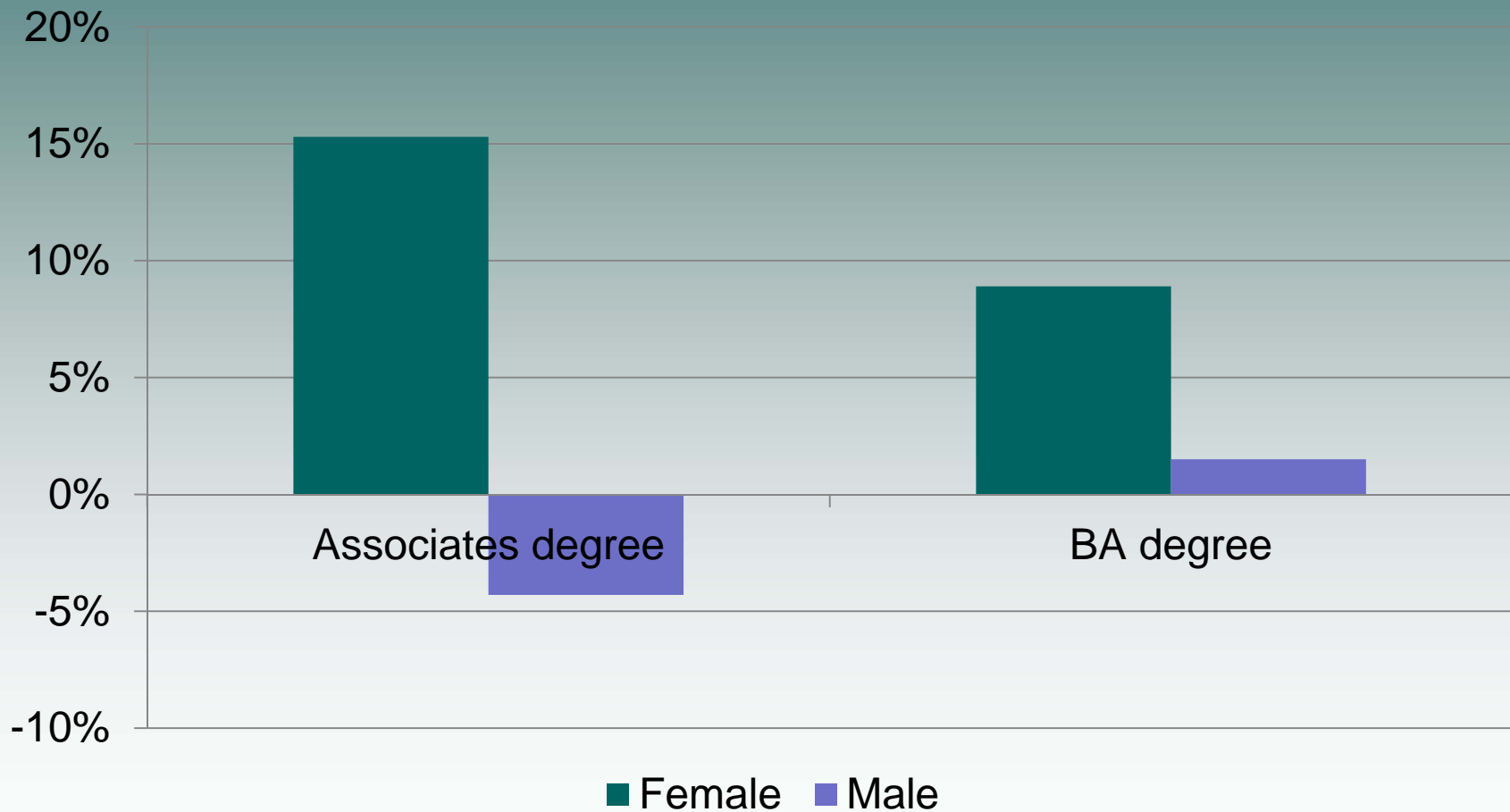


2. Certificates with attainment

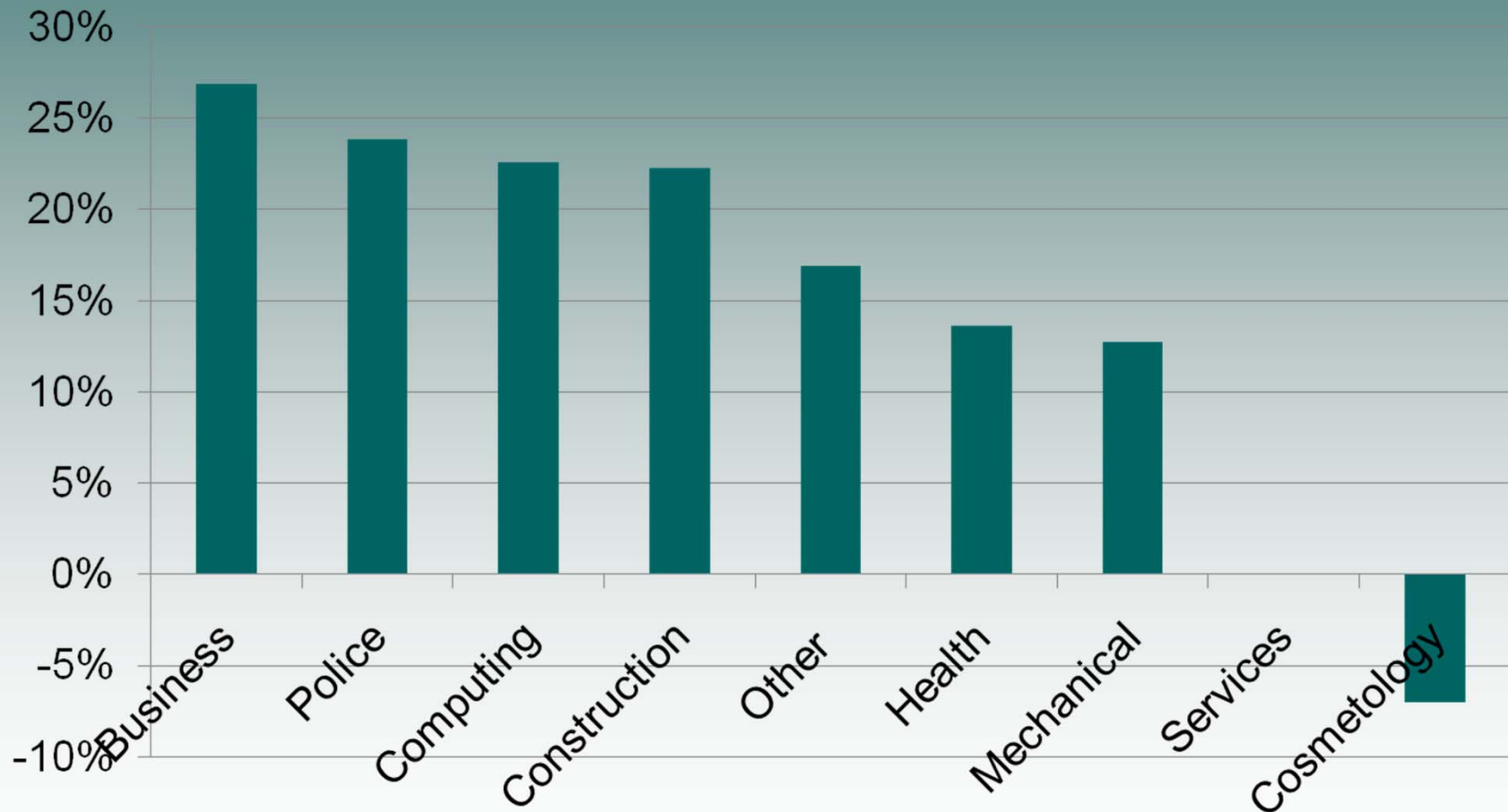
Male



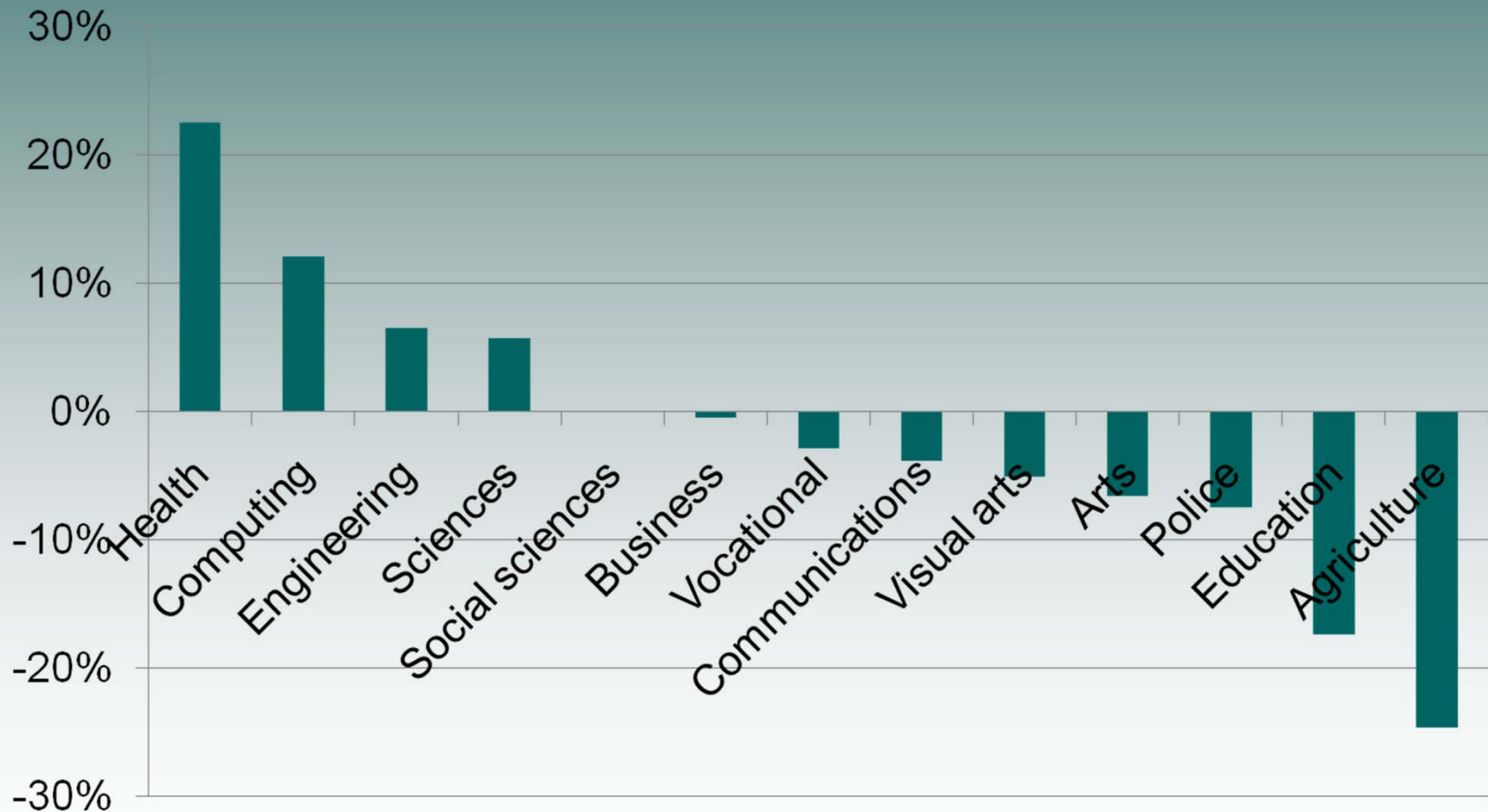
3. Earnings premium over academic credential



4a. Field of Study: Certificates



4b. Field of Study: AA degrees



Conclusions

- Returns to occupational credentials – certificates and AA degrees – are high, but many unknowns
- Concerns over articulation and optimal balance with academic study
- Significant structural change caused by the Great Recession: education programs may not be enough

For more information:

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