In the Final Analysis

“Yip yip yip yip yip yip yip mum mum mum
mum mum mum . . . Get a job. . . Sha na na na,
sha na na na na.”

— “Get a Job,” *The Silhouettes*

I loooooove a good list, and I was recently alerted to a particularly nifty one reported on both the *Time* magazine and Materials Technology@TMS websites. Specifically, the sites describe a recent study by the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce. The report is *What's It Worth? The Economic Value of College Majors*, and it analyzes 171 majors in 15 categories using newly available U.S. Census data.

The researchers found that while getting a bachelor's degree of pretty much any kind more than pays for itself, some undergraduate degrees are much more lucrative than others—sometimes by as much as 300 percent. Normally, I might file that conclusion in my “dah” folder, but what caught my attention was the list of top ten majors with the highest median earnings. From top to bottom, they are (1) petroleum engineer at \$120,000 per year; (2) pharmacy/pharmaceutical sciences and administration, \$105,000; (3) mathematics and computer sciences, \$98,000; (4) aerospace engineering, \$87,000; (5) chemical engineering, \$86,000; (6) electrical engineering, \$85,000; (7) naval architecture and marine engineering, \$82,000; (8) mechanical engineering, \$80,000; (9) metallurgical engineering, \$80,000; and (10) mining and mineral engineering, \$80,000.

Amazingly, the lifetime averages range from \$1,090,000 for engineering majors to \$241,000 for education majors. That's pretty cool (and gratifying) on the high end and pretty disappointing on the low end.

Now, I know that you have to be thinking, “What's at the bottom end of the scale?” I've got you covered. (I wonder what “psychic” majors make.) The majors with the lowest median earnings are (1) counseling/psychology, \$29,000; (2) early childhood education, \$36,000; (3) theology and religious vocations, \$38,000; (4) human services and community organizations, \$38,000; (5) social work, \$39,000; (6) drama and theater arts, \$40,000; (7) studio arts, \$40,000; (8) communication disorders sciences and services, \$40,000; (9) visual and performing arts, \$40,000; and (10) health and medical preparatory programs, \$40,000. Clearly, this is not good news for the helping and arts professionals.

While social scientist is in neither the top nor bottom ten, there are lots of data that will intrigue individuals in this profession. Some examples: The report finds that majors are highly segregated by ethnicity and gender. White men, for instance, are concentrated in the highest-earning majors. The highest-paid major for African-Americans is electrical engineering, but they earn \$22,000 less than white electrical engineers and \$12,000 less than Asian electrical engineers. Women, meanwhile, hold the majority of degrees in many lower-paying fields; women with degrees in the high-paying field of chemical engineering earn, on average, \$20,000 less than equally educated male counterparts.

What about graduate degrees? The report reveals that one's graduate degree can yield an earnings bump. The greatest gains are in health and medical preparatory programs (190 percent), miscellaneous social sciences (134 percent), and zoology (123 percent). The lowest bumps come in atmospheric sciences and meteorology (1 percent), studio arts (3 percent), and petroleum engineering (7 percent).

Finally, some fields revealed essentially no unemployment: geological and geophysical engineering, military technologies, pharmacology, and school student counseling. Those with the highest unemployment are social psychology (16 percent), nuclear engineering (11 percent), and educational administration and supervision (11 percent).

With one son entering college in three weeks and another in three years, it looks like I've got some new topics for dinner table conversation.

James J. Robinson
Publisher

JOM

184 Thorn Hill Road,
Warrendale, PA 15086, USA

Telephone: (724) 776-9000

Fax: (724) 776-3770

Web: www.tms.org/jom.html

E-Mail: jom@tms.org

PUBLISHER

James J. Robinson

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