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10 Best College Majors for a Lucrative Career



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Many Millennials grew up hearing that they should study what they love. While that's a nice sentiment, it's also landed countless recent grads in quagmires of student debt and unemployment. In today's tough economic climate, some college majors simply offer better prospects than others—and savvy students should want to know the difference.

That's why we came up with our list of the ten best college majors for your career. We analyzed the unemployment rates and salaries for graduates of the 100 most popular college majors, using data from Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce and Payscale.com.

What did we look for? Fields of study with grads—both recent grads within the past five years and those well into their careers—who enjoy an attractive combination of big paychecks and abundant employment opportunities. The undergraduate programs that we ranked can take from two to five years to complete.

Take a peek at our list of the ten best college majors for your career.

10 Best College Majors for a Lucrative Career

10. Medical Assisting Services



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associate's degree will enjoy far better job prospects than most grads and earn nearly as much money as a young B.A.-holder. Medical-assisting majors study office administration and basic clinical skills, such as transcription, coding and lab procedures. They generally work in doctors' offices, taking patient history, performing basic tests, and tracking insurance and other paperwork as needed.

10. Medical Assisting Services

9. Management Information Systems



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salary growth after that. The major prepares students to work in IT for big organizations—helping clueless technophobes fix their e-mail, sure, but also building, securing and maintaining a network for an entire company.

9. Management Information Systems

8. Construction Services

Unemployment rate: 2.9% (Average for all grads with a bachelor's degree: 4.9%)

Unemployment rate for recent grads: 5.4% (Average for top 100 majors: 7.7%)

Median salary: \$51,000 (Median for all grads with bachelor's: \$54,756)

Median salary for recent grads: \$43,000 (Median for top 100 majors: \$37,000)

Projected job growth for this field, 2010–2020: 31% (Average: 14%)

If you don't mind following doctors' orders, medical assisting is a pretty sweet deal. The average medical assistant with a two-year

Unemployment rate: 4.2%

Unemployment rate for recent grads: 7.4%

Median salary: \$71,000

Median salary for recent grads: \$51,000

Projected job growth for this field, 2010–2020: 18%

Not all computer majors are created equal, contrary to rumor and admissions-office hype. Computer-networking majors, for instance, see 8.2% unemployment and a \$37,300 salary upon graduation. But management information systems majors can expect high starting salaries right out of school, and strong job and



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on to oversee projects ranging from office buildings to power plants. The workplace isn't as glamorous as a swanky office, but new construction services grads make more money than new grads in finance, general engineering and pre-law.

8. Construction Services

7. Medical Technologies



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majors study chemistry, biology and clinical laboratory skills; after graduation, they work in hospitals, doctors' offices and diagnostic labs analyzing patient samples.

7. Medical Technologies

6. Electrical Engineering

Unemployment rate: 5.4%

Unemployment rate for recent grads: N/A

Median salary: \$65,000

Median salary for recent grads: \$50,200

Projected job growth for this field, 2010–2020: 17%

Construction services may seem an odd choice in a down economy, when building projects can grind to a halt. Still, there's enough demand for general contractors and construction managers to keep unemployment at a tidy 5.4%. Construction-services majors study project scheduling and construction law and go

Unemployment rate: 1.4%

Unemployment rate for recent grads: 5.4%

Median salary: \$58,000

Median salary for recent grads: \$45,100

Projected job growth for this field, 2010–2020: 13%

Medical technologists are in serious demand—so serious, in fact, that some hospitals try to tempt recent grads with perks such as sign-on bonuses. In addition to the abundance of employment opportunities, medical-technologies majors can look forward to above-average starting salaries. In school,



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modest, with a 10-year projection below the 14% average for all occupations. Still, consistent demand for qualified electrical engineers keeps unemployment in check. Nearly 300,000 electrical engineers design and test components for manufacturers, engineering firms and power plants across the country.

6. Electrical Engineering

5. Chemical Engineering



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engineers study chemistry, physics and biology in school. But after graduation, these engineers stand to enjoy high five-figure salaries in labs and offices and a very low unemployment rate.

5. Chemical Engineering

4. Treatment Therapy Professions

Unemployment rate: 5.0%

Unemployment rate for recent grads: 7.3%

Median salary: \$86,000

Median salary for recent grads: \$57,000

Projected job growth for this field, 2010–2020: 6%

Electrical engineering isn't for the faint of heart or the mathematically challenged. But if you can survive four years of differential equations and circuit theory, you're on track to make \$57,000 a year at your first job. That's \$20,000 more than the median salary for new grads in the top 100 majors. Long-term job growth is

Unemployment rate: 3.8%

Unemployment rate for recent grads: 7.5%

Median salary: \$86,000

Median salary for recent grads: \$64,500

Projected job growth for this field, 2010–2020: 6%

Chemical engineering majors make more money out of school than any other major on our list. If that's not enough to send you running for the chem lab, consider the fact that, a few years in, the average chemical engineer will make over \$30,000 more than his friends in other fields. The work isn't easy. Chemical



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field, after a few years. Treatment therapy programs generally include anatomy and physiology courses, as well as chemistry, physics and pharmacology. Regardless of specialty, most therapists work in hospitals or nursing homes.

4. Treatment Therapy Professions

3. Transportation Sciences and Technology



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program, transportation sciences can also include fields such as materials engineering and automotive-technology management.

3. Transportation Sciences and Technology

2. Nursing

Unemployment rate: 2.6%

Unemployment rate for recent grads: 5.4%

Median salary: \$62,000

Median salary for recent grads: \$60,400

Projected job growth for this field, 2010–2020: 33%

While physical therapists typically need a doctorate degree, respiratory, radiation and recreational therapists make the big bucks on a B.A. alone. Recent grads start off at \$60,400, one of the highest salaries on our list. Radiation therapists, for example, stand to make \$75,000, the national median for that particular therapy

Unemployment rate: 4.4%

Unemployment rate for recent grads: N/A

Median salary: \$68,000

Median salary for recent grads: \$53,100

Projected job growth for this field, 2010–2020: 5%

Head in the clouds? Hardly a bad thing. Aeronautics and aviation technology majors can expect to earn more than \$50,000 right out of school—and as much as \$90,000 midway through their careers. Most study engineering, mechanics and aerodynamics and work for airplane manufacturers. Depending on the



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an R.N. certification after two years, nurses with bachelor's degrees generally enjoy better salaries, earning potential and advancement opportunities than their less-educated peers.

2. Nursing

1. Pharmacy and Pharmacology



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and drug interactions. But whether pharmacy undergrads go on to med school, research or some related field, they can expect to earn big salaries fast. Pharmacists stand to make six figures working in hospitals and stores. Both programs involve pharmacology, toxicology and ethics classes—and promise plenty of jobs when class lets out. Even among recent grads, unemployment is a low 5.4%.

1. Pharmacy and Pharmacology

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Unemployment rate: 2.2%

Unemployment rate for recent grads: 4.0%

Median salary: \$60,000

Median salary for recent grads: \$48,000

Projected job growth for this field, 2010–2020: 26%

Nursing has always made for a steady, well-paid career, but it's looking especially good as baby-boomers age. Demand for nurses is way up, so unemployment, even among new grads, is down. Nursing majors study a predictable list of health care subjects including anatomy, physiology and biology. While you can score

Unemployment rate: 3.2%

Unemployment rate for recent grads: 5.4%

Median salary: \$105,000

Median salary for recent grads: \$51,200

Projected job growth for this field, 2010–2020: 25%

A pharmacy major can be a bit of an investment, since most states require students to earn a post-grad degree to work as a pharmacist. However, pharmacologists, who don't necessarily require graduate training, can land jobs right out of college. Public and private labs hire recent grads to research drugs



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