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Worst College Majors for Your Career



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Make no mistake: An undergraduate degree can improve your employment prospects and paycheck size. A high school graduate earns 40% less than someone with a bachelor's degree and is more than twice as likely to be unemployed. But not all college majors are created equal. In fact, grads with certain majors sometimes fare worse in the labor force than workers who stopped studying after high school.

Considering the time and expense that goes into earning a college degree, knowing whether your course of study is a career-killer is powerful knowledge indeed. That's why we analyzed the jobless rates and salaries for graduates with the 100 most popular majors to come up with our list of the ten worst values in

college majors.

Using data from Payscale.com and Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce, we looked for majors whose graduates—both recent grads (within the past five years) and those well into their careers—face a brutal combination of low compensation and high unemployment. We also worked with Payscale to determine the likelihood that recent graduates from each major would end up working in retail, where a college degree isn't always required, rather than in their field of study. A ratio of 1.0 is the norm; a ratio of 2.0 means a graduate of that major is twice as likely to work in retail as the average college grad.

Check out our list of the 10 worst college majors for your career.

Worst College Majors for Your Career

10. English



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Unemployment rate: 6.7% (average for all graduates with bachelor's degree: 4.9%)

Unemployment rate for recent grads: 9.2% (average for top 100 majors: 7.7%)

Median salary: \$48,000 (median for all grads with bachelor's: \$54,756)

Median salary for recent grads: \$32,000 (median for top 100 majors: \$37,000)

Projected job growth for this field, 2010-2020: 6% (average: 14%)

Likelihood of working retail: 1.4 times average

Author G.K. Chesterton once called literature "a luxury," which might be true for cash-strapped English grads. A hallmark of most liberal arts programs, English hasn't fared well in the down economy. Nearly one in ten recent English grads struggles to find work, and starting salaries are low, a full 14% below the median for the top 100 majors. More problematic: That situation doesn't improve much with experience. Even older English grads stand to make nearly \$9,000 less than the median bachelor's degree holder, who pockets \$54,756 a year.

10. English

9. Sociology



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Unemployment rate: 7.0%

Unemployment rate for recent grads: 8.6%

Median salary: \$45,000

Median salary for recent grads: \$32,000

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

Likelihood of working retail: 1.4 times average

Sociology is one of the most popular undergraduate majors, but judging by the numbers, it probably shouldn't be. New grads face an unemployment rate slightly worse than

the national average for all workers and far worse than the average for college-educated ones. Once they get a job, they can expect to make about 14% less than recent grads from the top 100 majors. Students interested in the social sciences should probably check out economics, statistics or political science – all of which pay better than sociology.

9. Sociology

8. Drama and Theater Arts



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median for the top 100 majors and only 2.3 times the federal poverty level. To further complicate things, theater and film are competitive fields, and job growth is stalling out. Nearly nine in ten theater grads will end up in another field, such as office work, education or sales. Drama students are also more than twice as likely as other college grads to end up working retail after school.

8. Drama and Theater Arts

7. Liberal Arts



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Even experienced liberal arts grads face low salaries and high unemployment, and nearly one in ten new grads is unemployed. Three of every four will end up going to graduate school. You'll have to decide for yourself whether that springs from a deep-seated love of learning or the otherwise dim employment prospects.

7. Liberal Arts

6. Studio Arts

Unemployment rate: 7.1%

Unemployment rate for recent grads: 7.8%

Median salary: \$40,000

Median salary for recent grads: \$26,000

Projected job growth for this field, 2010-2020: 4%

Likelihood of working retail: 2.1 times average

Unless you're Will Smith or Angelina Jolie, drama will probably not pay off. In fact, the starting salary for a drama and theater arts major is the lowest on our list – 30% below the

Unemployment rate: 7.6%

Unemployment rate for recent grads: 9.2%

Median salary: \$48,000

Median salary for recent grads: \$30,000

Projected job growth for this field, 2010-2020: not available

Likelihood of working retail: 1.8 times average

No matter which college you go to, you're sure to find academics arguing over the value of the classic liberal arts education. While we won't take sides, the numbers paint a dim picture:



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artists themselves. But as one university career center warns, that's not exactly a foolproof source of income: Studio art majors lack a "strictly defined career path," which may explain why the median salary falls 32% below the average for a college grad with a bachelor's degree, and salary-growth prospects are practically zero.

6. Studio Arts

5. Graphic Design



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unemployment rate for all college grads with bachelor's degrees. The situation doesn't improve with time. Even experienced graphic design majors contend with a high jobless rate, a median salary almost \$10,000 below the norm, and a crowded field with limited advancement opportunities.

5. Graphic Design

4. Philosophy and Religious Studies

Unemployment rate: 8.0%

Unemployment rate for recent grads: 11.1%

Median salary: \$37,000

Median salary for recent grads: \$35,900

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

Likelihood of working retail: 2.3 times average

Tomorrow's starving artists are today's studio art majors – statistically speaking, at least. Studio art majors generally study painting, sculpture or other media in order to become

Unemployment rate: 8.1%

Unemployment rate for recent grads: 11.8%

Median salary: \$45,000

Median salary for recent grads: \$32,000

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

Likelihood of working retail: 0.6 times average

The numbers for graphic design aren't pretty, no matter what font you write them in. Recent grads face low starting salaries and superhigh unemployment--more than double the 4.9%



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19% less than young grads from the top 100 majors, and the gap narrows only slightly for experienced workers with degrees in philosophy and religious studies. Among the liberal arts majors, U.S. history and art history both pay better. Our philosophy, at least, is to look into a major with a better return on investment.

4. Philosophy and Religious Studies

3. Film and Photography



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face tough competition in a crowded industry, and low starting salaries are the norm even in expensive industry hubs such as New York and Los Angeles. Interestingly, film and photography grads are still the best-paid of the art majors, though they make almost \$10,000 less than the typical holder of a bachelor's degree.

3. Film and Photography

2. Fine Arts

Unemployment rate: 7.2%

Unemployment rate for recent grads: 10.8%

Median salary: \$42,000

Median salary for recent grads: \$30,000

Projected job growth for this field, 2010-2020: not available

Likelihood of working retail: 2.0 times average

Philosophy might improve your mind, but it won't do much for your pocketbook. In fact, the salary prospects for a philosophy major could be called ascetic. Recent grads make

Unemployment rate: 7.3%

Unemployment rate for recent grads: 12.9%

Median salary: \$45,000

Median salary for recent grads: \$30,000

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

Likelihood of working retail: 2.6 times average

Shutterbugs beware: The new-grad unemployment rate for film and photography majors is only narrowly better than the rate for high school dropouts. Film and photo students



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highest on our list. When fine-arts majors do find jobs, they generally don't pay well. Even experienced artists can expect to make 20% less than their college classmates. While few people have ever gone into art for the money, the East Village isn't as cheap as it used to be.

2. Fine Arts

1. Anthropology



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majority face stifling unemployment, forcing nearly a third to take low-paying office or sales jobs. More dramatically, recent grads stand to make a mere \$28,000 per year – less than the median pay for someone with only a high school diploma. If foreign cultures are your thing, a major in international relations promises both a higher salary and lower unemployment rate.

1. Anthropology

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Unemployment rate: 7.4%

Unemployment rate for recent grads: 12.6%

Median salary: \$44,000

Median salary for recent grads: \$30,000

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

Likelihood of working retail: 1.8 times average

The employment situation for recent art-school grads is anything but aesthetic. Slow job growth and an abundance of fine-arts majors means unemployment is high – the second

Unemployment rate: 6.9%

Recent grad employment rate: 10.5%

Median salary: \$40,000

Median salary for recent grads: \$28,000

Projected job growth for this field, 2010-2020: 21%

Likelihood of working retail: 2.1 times average

Many of today's anthropology grads are studying a culture they didn't expect: the intergenerational American household, as seen from their parents' couch. New anthropology



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