BlogPost

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What Should You Really Expect to Earn Five Years After College?

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1. Introduction

Choosing a college major or stressing over grades can feel like decisions that will shape the rest of your life, and many students wonder what these choices actually mean for their future income. To help answer these questions, we analyzed real data from the American Community Survey to understand how college graduates are doing five years after earning their degree. In this article, we break down how factors like GPA, major, and gender relate to salary in the early career years without the confusing technical language. Whether you're a current student, a recent graduate, or someone advising the next generation, this guide is designed to give you a clear, data-driven look at what influences earnings and what matters less than you might think.
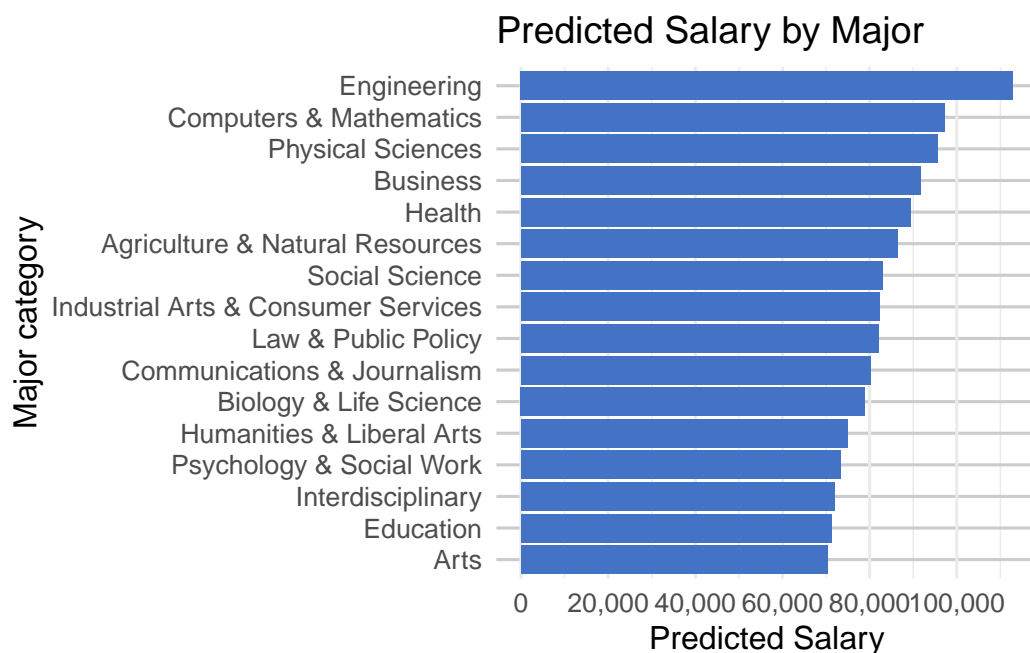
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2. Impact of GPA

When looking at how grades relate to future earnings, the data shows a real, though not overwhelming, connection. On average, each one-point increase in GPA is linked to earning about $5,400 more per year, and the true effect is very likely somewhere between $4,700 and $6,100. So yes, GPA does matter, but not in the "your life depends on perfect grades" way that many students fear. A strong GPA can give you a helpful boost, but it's far from the only factor shaping your salary after graduation. Interestingly, the importance of GPA also shifts depending on what you study. While differences across majors aren't huge, some fields reward high academic performance more consistently than others. In these majors, employers may view GPA as a stronger signal of technical skill or work ethic. In other areas, experience,

internships, or portfolios might speak louder than a transcript. Overall, GPA matters but it shouldn't be a source of extreme stress. It's one piece of a much bigger career puzzle.

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3. Salaries Across Majors

- **Differences in salary by major:**
  {{State whether your dataset shows significant salary differences among majors.}}

- **High-Earning Majors:**
  {{List or describe which majors appear to earn the highest salaries based on your data.}}

Predicted Salary by Major

Major category	Predicted Salary

(Engineering, Computers & Mathematics, Physical Sciences, Business, Health, Agriculture & Natural Resources, Social Science, Industrial Arts & Consumer Services, Law & Public Policy, Communications & Journalism, Biology & Life Science, Humanities & Liberal Arts, Psychology & Social Work, Interdisciplinary, Education, Arts)

There is a difference in salary for different majors. We found that the average salary 5 year

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4. Salaries for Women and Men

When comparing salaries between men and women within the same major category, the data reveals a persistent difference. Even after accounting for GPA and field of study, women earn about $2,700 less per year than men on average. This gap doesn't look the same in every major, though some fields show very little difference, while others show noticeably larger ones. The interaction between gender and major indicates that in a few specific categories, the gap widens or narrows depending on the nature of the work or industry norms. For example, in some major categories, the salary difference swings by an additional $1,000–$2,300, either reducing or increasing the gap. Looking at your own major category, these patterns would highlight whether your field tends to reward men and women equally or whether a meaningful difference appears. While the exact reasons behind these gaps can be complex, the takeaway is clear: salary differences between men and women do exist, and they aren't the same across all majors. Understanding these patterns can help students make informed decisions and advocate more confidently when entering the job market.

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5. Other Factors — The Value of a College Education

Problem Background

- **Predictors of Salary:**
  {{Describe how well your dataset's existing variables explain or predict salary outcomes.}}

- **Missing or Additional Variables:**
  {{List important factors not included in the dataset that likely influence salary (e.g., internships, geographic location, work experience).}}

- **Specific Example Demonstrating Prediction Quality:**
  {{Walk through one specific example that illustrates how well—or poorly—your model or variables predict salary.}}

  Our model will predict the salary of a person, and on average be off by about $5700. We currently are using a person's Major, GPA, and sex to predict their salary. There are other variables that would potentially help us to better predict salary, including but not limited to times changing industries, continued eduction (i.e. a Master's Program), and geographic locations. All of these are factors that partially determine a salary. Another potential determinant is how much they liked their major, as a person who likes their work is more likely to perform well and get raises. To give an example of our predicition compared to the true salaries, we randomly selected a person from the dataset, and

predicted their salary. We predicted a salary of "\$XXXX", and they had a salary of XXXX dollars. So we were off by XXXX dollars.

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6. Conclusions

- **Key Takeaways:**
  {{State the main message readers should remember after reading the article. Summarize your most important findings in 2–4 sentences.}}

  Beats me