Degrees That Pay Off: Exploring Salary Trends by Major

By thedataflorist January 21, 2025

In today's ever-changing job market, the choice of an undergraduate major can significantly influence one's financial trajectory. With education being one of the largest investments of time and money, understanding how different majors impact career earnings is essential for students, parents, and professionals looking to optimize their decisions. This data visualization dives deep into salary trends across various majors, providing a detailed look at starting salaries, mid-career earnings, and salary growth percentages.
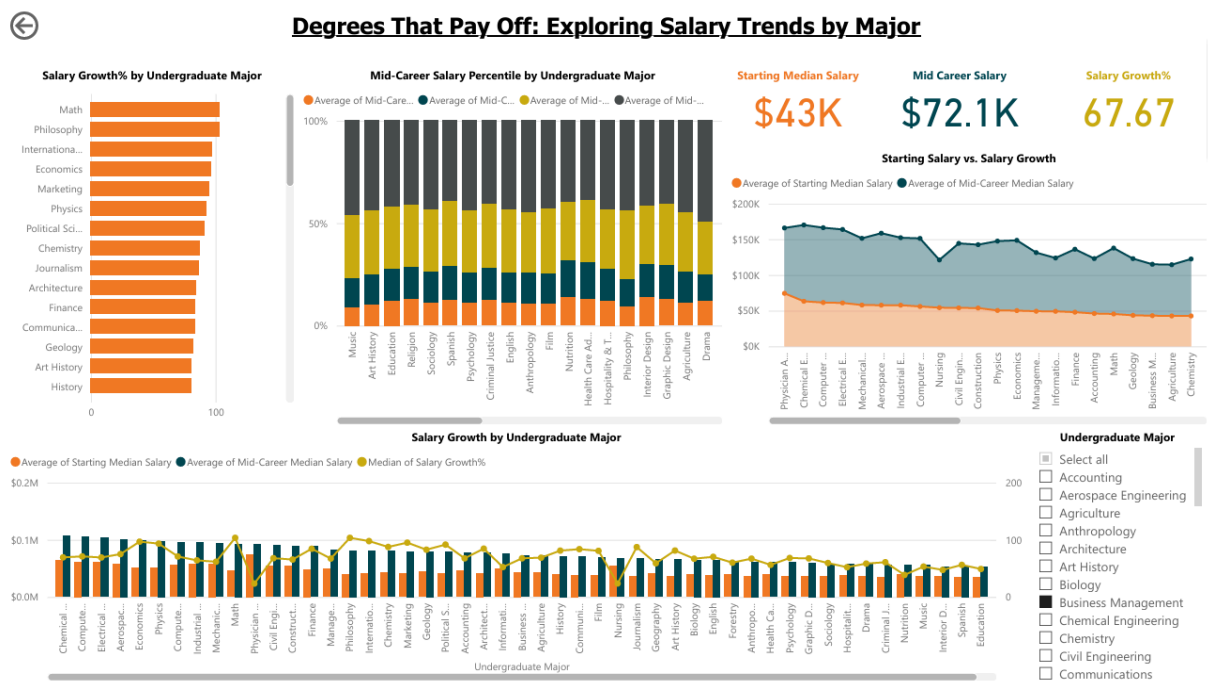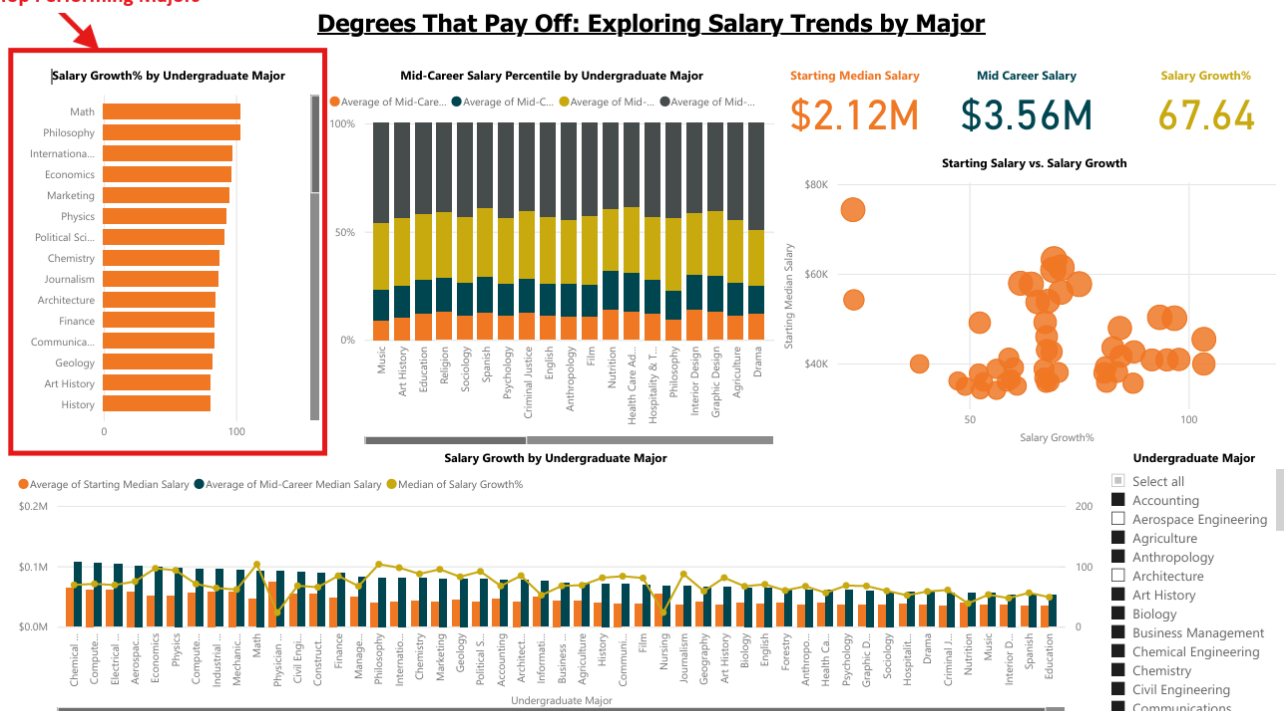
✿ Key insights :

↪ Top Performing Majors:

Fields such as Mathematics, Philosophy, and Economics are standout performers, showing salary growth rates exceeding 60% over the course of a career. These fields may offer relatively modest starting salaries but demonstrate significant earning potential as careers progress.

↪ Starting vs. Mid-Career Salaries:

While some fields like Art History and Sociology have modest starting salaries, others such as Engineering and Finance demonstrate strong earning potential early and steady growth into mid-career stages.

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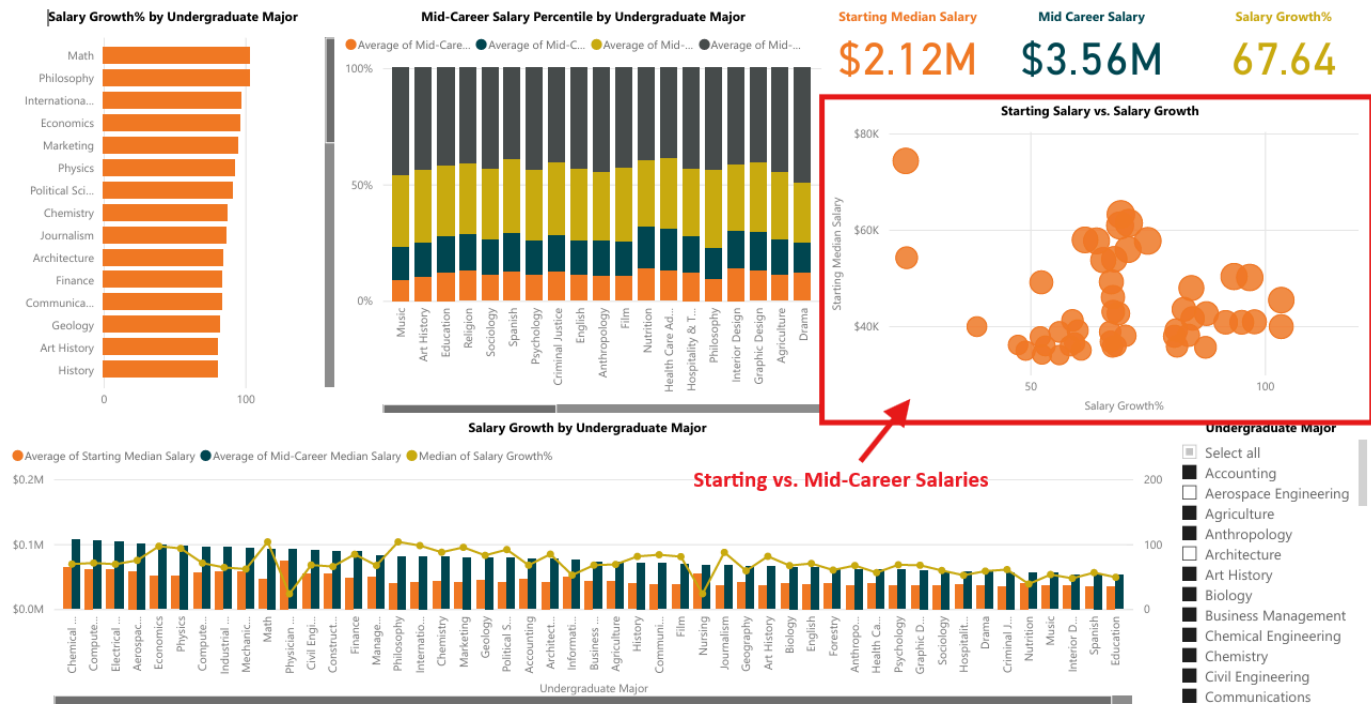
↪ Mid-Career Highlights: Overall Trends

The dashboard highlights disparities between majors in terms of earning potential, giving prospective students and professionals a clear picture of how their educational paths may influence their career trajectory.

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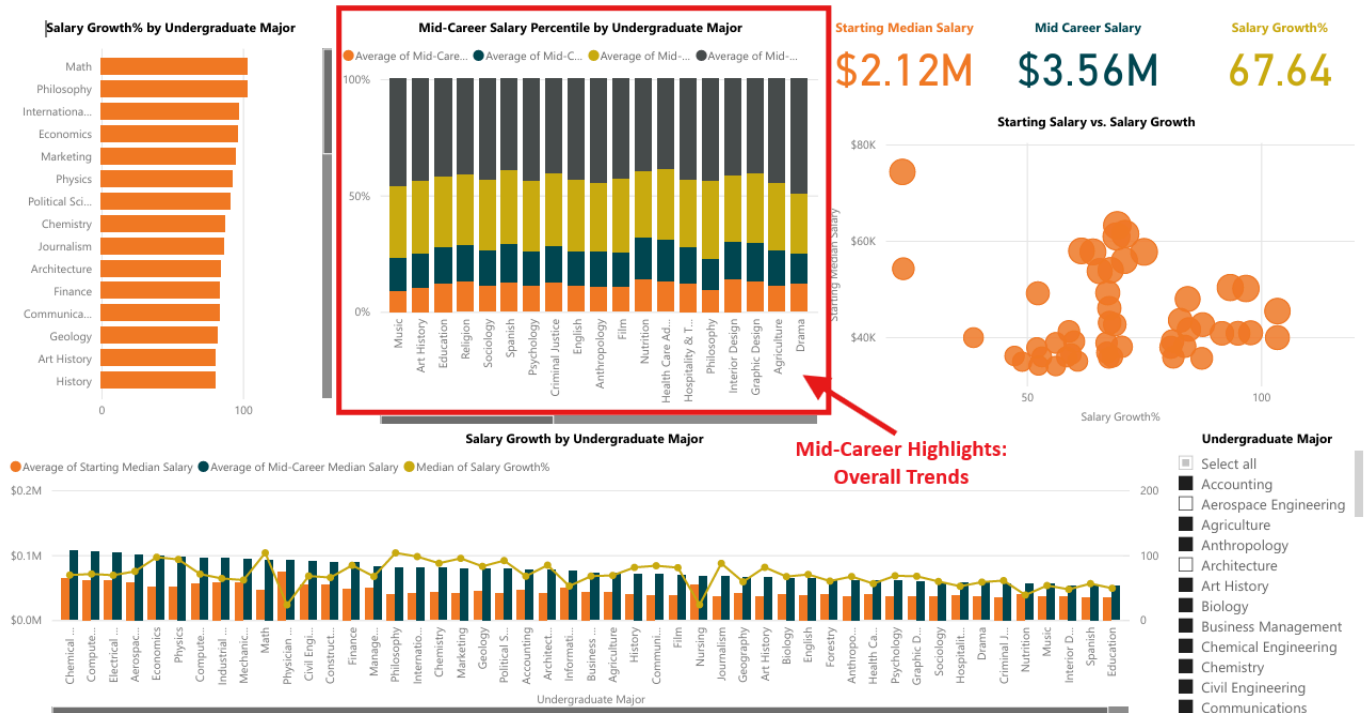**Salary Growth% by Undergraduate Major**

Math
Philosophy
Internationa...
Economics
Marketing
Physics
Political Sci...
Chemistry
Journalism
Architecture
Finance
Communica...
Geology
Art History
History

0   100

Mid-Career Salary Percentile by Undergraduate Major

● Average of Mid-Care... ● Average of Mid-C... ● Average of Mid-... ● Average of Mid-...

100%
50%
0%

Music, Art History, Education, Religion, Sociology, Spanish, Psychology, Criminal Justice, English, Anthropology, Film, Nutrition, Health Care Ad..., Hospitality & T..., Philosophy, Interior Design, Graphic Design, Agriculture, Drama

Salary Growth by Undergraduate Major

Starting Median Salary — $2.12M

Mid Career Salary — $3.56M

Salary Growth% — 67.64

Starting Salary vs. Salary Growth

$80K
$60K
$40K

50   100
Salary Growth%

Mid-Career Highlights: Overall Trends

● Average of Starting Median Salary ● Average of Mid-Career Median Salary ● Median of Salary Growth%

$0.2M
$0.1M
$0.0M

200
100
0

Chemical..., Compute..., Electrical..., Aerospac..., Economics, Physics, Compute..., Industrial..., Mechanic..., Math, Physician..., Civil Engi..., Construct..., Finance, Manage..., Philosophy, Internatio..., Chemistry, Marketing, Geology, Political S..., Accounting, Architect..., Informati..., Business..., Agriculture, History, Communi..., Film, Nursing, Journalism, Geography, Art History, Biology, English, Forestry, Anthropo..., Health Ca..., Psychology, Graphic D..., Sociology, Hospitalit..., Drama, Criminal J..., Nutrition, Music, Interior D..., Spanish, Education

Undergraduate Major

Undergraduate Major

☑ Select all
■ Accounting
☐ Aerospace Engineering
■ Agriculture
■ Anthropology
☐ Architecture
■ Art History
■ Biology
■ Business Management
■ Chemical Engineering
■ Chemistry
■ Civil Engineering
■ Communications

↪ **Comprehensive Salary Trends:**

By examining metrics such as starting median salary, mid-career median salary, and overall growth rates, the analysis provides a holistic perspective on the financial returns of higher education across disciplines. This enables users to compare and contrast the financial trajectories of various majors effectively.

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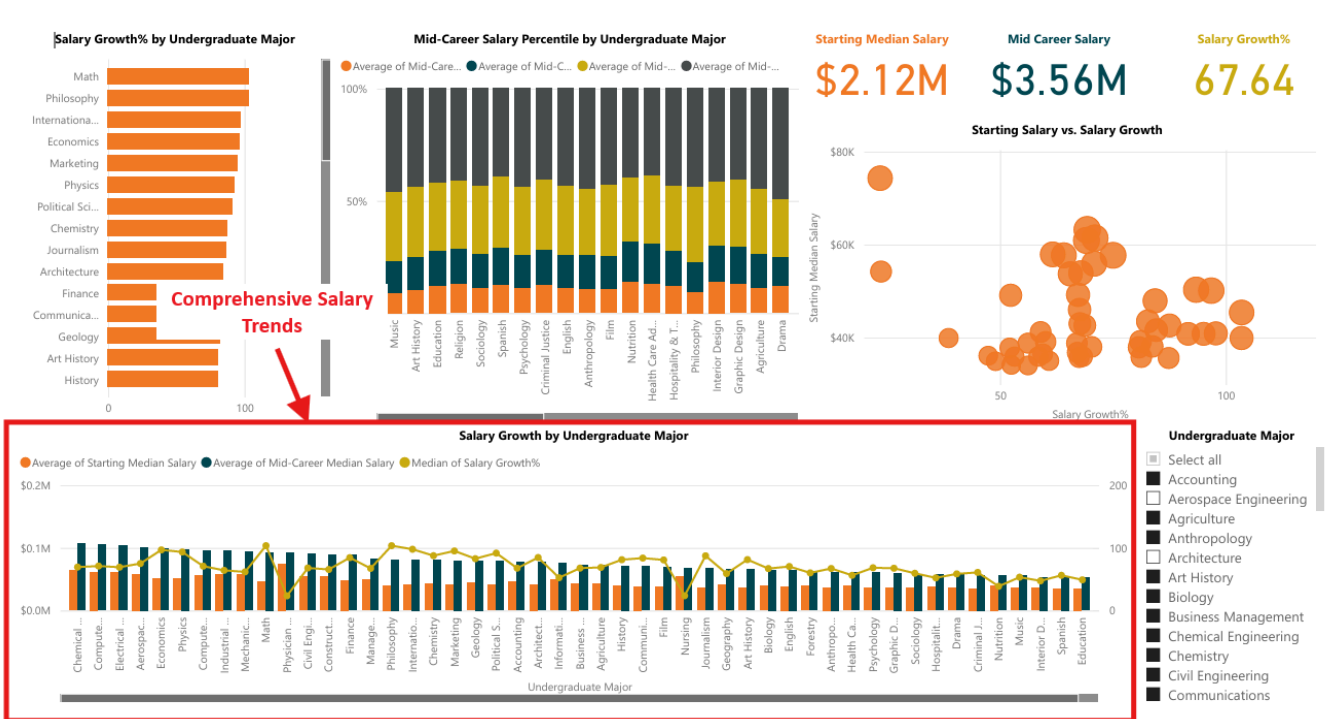
🌼 Why This Analysis Matters:

For students selecting their majors, this analysis offers clarity on how their choices may impact their financial futures. Professionals considering a career pivot can also use this data to identify fields with higher growth potential. Additionally, this resource helps parents and educators provide informed guidance about the implications of different educational paths.

By leveraging Power BI, this visualization presents the data in an engaging and interactive way, allowing users to explore which degrees truly pay off. Whether you're a student selecting a major or a professional considering a career pivot, these insights can help guide your decisions.

🌼 Practical Applications:

This analysis can serve multiple purposes:

For Students:

A roadmap to select majors that align with their financial and career aspirations.

For Career Switchers:

Insights into fields with the potential for long-term salary growth, aiding in strategic career planning.

For Institutions and Policymakers:

A tool to identify areas where educational investments can yield the highest returns for graduates, influencing curriculum planning and resource allocation.

By presenting this data in an engaging and accessible format, this analysis aims to empower individuals to make informed decisions about their education and career paths. Whether you are starting your academic journey, re-evaluating your career, or advising others, understanding the financial implications of different degrees is a critical step toward a successful future.

❀ Credits:

- Data Source: *https://www.kaggle.com/datasets/wsj/college-salaries/data*
- Tools Used: *Power BI, Microsoft Excel*