



Ranking the Most and Least Valuable College Majors

Architectural Engineering takes the top spot, Visual and Performing Arts ranks last

NEW YORK – October 4, 2021 – Architectural Engineering ranks as the most valuable college major while Visual and Performing Arts ranks as the least valuable degree, according to a new Bankrate.com report. The study ranked 159 majors based on several factors pertaining to degree holders (weighting in parenthesis): median annual income (70%), unemployment rate (20%) and career paths that do not demand schooling beyond a bachelor’s degree (10%). Click here for more information:

<https://www.bankrate.com/loans/student-loans/most-valuable-college-majors/>

Architectural Engineering majors earn a hefty median annual salary of \$90,000 (tied for 17th highest) along with a low unemployment rate of 1.3% amongst graduates (9th best). The percentage of Architectural Engineering majors with an advanced degree (29.3%) is also relatively low (45th lowest), meaning Architectural Engineering graduates are less likely than many others to incur the added expense and/or deferred income of an advanced degree.

Overall, STEM degrees – those with a focus on science, technology, engineering, and math skills – dominate the top of the ranks. The five most valuable college majors are:

Rank	College Major	Median Income	Unemployment Rate	Higher Degree Holders
1	Architectural Engineering	\$90,000	1.3%	29.3%
2	Construction Services	\$80,000	1.0%	12.1%
3	Computer Engineering	\$101,000	2.3%	39.7%
4	Aerospace Engineering	\$100,000	1.9%	50.7%
5	Transportation Sciences and Technologies	\$86,000	1.8%	21.1%

Meanwhile, Visual and Performing Arts is the least valuable college major. Those with a Visual and Performing Arts degree earn the lowest median annual salary (\$35,500) and face a 3.6% unemployment rate, 17th highest of any major. Additionally, 28.7% of Visual and Performing Arts graduates have invested in an advanced degree, more than 41 other majors.

Overall, Arts degrees comprise much of the bottom of the ranks, thanks to low salaries and high unemployment rates amongst graduates. The five least valuable college majors are:

Rank	College Major	Median Income	Unemployment Rate	Higher Degree Holders
155	Clinical Psychology	\$49,000	3.8%	78.1%
156	Composition and Speech	\$42,000	4.9%	30.4%
157	Drama and Theater Arts	\$41,000	4.5%	31.4%
158	Miscellaneous Fine Arts	\$38,000	5.6%	16.7%
159	Visual and Performing Arts	\$35,500	3.6%	28.7%

The prospect of a high salary isn't everything when it comes to assessing the value of a specific college major. For example, Nuclear Engineering – tied for the fourth highest median income among degree holders (\$100,000) – fails to crack the top 25 most valuable majors overall (27th) due to a 3.7% unemployment rate amongst graduates (15th highest). Additionally, about half (50.6%) of those with a Nuclear Engineering degree have gone on to earn an advanced degree (41st highest).

Furthermore, an advanced degree doesn't always translate to higher earnings. Four of the five majors with the highest percentage of advanced degree holders (ranging from 73.5% to 94%) do not earn a top 50 median salary.

“Higher education is one of the most important financial decisions many people make, so it is important to strike a balance between passion, earning potential, and job opportunities,” said Bankrate.com analyst Sarah Foster. “Researching a major’s prospects ahead of time can help students gain a better sense of what needs to be done to succeed in any field.”

Methodology:

To determine the most valuable majors, Bankrate looked at the most recent data available from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey, based on interviews of more than 2 million Americans. Bankrate extracted the 2019 data from IPUMS USA, the clearinghouse of census data hosted by the University of Minnesota. Bankrate analyzed bachelor’s degree holders who were in the labor force and either employed or seeking work. We looked at the 159 majors reported by at least 250 people in the 2019 ACS. We also looked at how many college graduates went on to earn advanced degrees, including master’s degrees or doctorates. To construct our ranking, Bankrate examined three factors (weightings in parentheses): median income (70 percent), unemployment rate (20 percent) and the percentage of people with an advanced degree (10 percent). The final income data and labor force data was rounded to the nearest hundred.

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