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Worst-Paying College Degrees

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There's no denying the value of a college education: According to recent U.S. Census surveys, the median salary for college grads is more than $20,000 higher than that of people with only a high school diploma. And the unemployment rate for people with bachelor's degrees is almost half the rate for people without.

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But some degrees are worth more than others, as PayScale.com shows in its 2010 report on the earning power of bachelor's degrees.

No surprise, engineering degrees continue to be top earners--and (also no big shocker) you have to go pretty far down the list before you see the liberal arts well represented.

But there's more to choosing a major than comparing dollar amounts. We salute and congratulate the graduates whose interests (and hard work) have led them to the following degrees--the lowest-earning degrees on PayScale's list.

10. Drama (starting annual salary: $35,600; mid-career annual salary: $56,600)
Some mega-millionaire movie stars with drama degrees (Denzel Washington and Meryl Streep, for instance) may be skewing these numbers upward--for every Denzel and Meryl, there are thousands of thespians struggling to make ends meet. But you don't study drama because you want to get rich--you study drama because you love the theater. (And an ability to act comes in handy in many professions.)

9. Fine arts (starting annual salary: $35,800; mid-career annual salary: $56,300)
Well, it takes an artist to make a thrift-store wardrobe look like a million bucks.

8. Hospitality and tourism (starting annual salary: $37,000; mid-career annual salary: $54,300)
Jobs that include tips may be skewing these numbers downward--and this is an industry that looks to be on the rebound as the economy improves. Plus, the perks associated with jobs in hospitality and tourism may compensate for the comparatively low salaries--many jobs in the industry allow extensive travel (or provide considerable travel discounts).

7. Education (starting annual salary: $36,200; mid-career annual salary: $54,100)
For the right people, teaching is an immensely rewarding career--and it's truly a noble one. The good news is, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the employment opportunities for primary, secondary, and special education teachers are expected to grow by 14 percent in the coming decade. And there will be plenty of new opportunities in continuing education for adults, as professional skill requirements change ever more rapidly.

6. Horticulture (starting annual salary: $37,200; mid-career annual salary: $53,400)
It seems that a green thumb doesn't necessarily bring in the greenbacks. But when you work among flowers and plants in a nursery or garden, who needs 'em?