

Study Tells Students What Their Major is Worth

PHILADELPHIA (AP) - The choice of undergraduate major in college is strongly tied to a student's future earnings, with the highest-paying majors providing salaries of about 300 percent more than the lowest-paying, according to a study released Tuesday.

Based on first-of-its-kind Census data, the report by Georgetown University in Washington also found that majors are highly segregated by race and gender.

College graduates overall make 84 percent more over a lifetime than those with only high school diplomas, the study said. But further analysis of 171 majors shows that various undergraduate majors can lead to significantly different median wages.

Petroleum engineering majors make about \$120,000 a year, compared with \$29,000 annually for counseling psychology majors, researchers found. Math and computer science majors earn \$98,000 in salary while early childhood education majors get paid about \$36,000.

"It's important that you go to college and get a (bachelor's degree), but it's almost three to four times more important what you take," said Anthony Carnevale, director of Georgetown's Center on Education and the Workforce. "The majors that are most popular are not the ones that make the most money."

"What's it Worth? The Economic Value of College Majors" analyzes data from the 2009 American Community Survey, whose results were released last year. It's the first

time the Census asked individuals about their undergraduate majors, enabling researchers to tie in salary data, Carnevale said.

The study found that white men are concentrated in the highest-earning majors, including engineering and pharmaceutical sciences, while women gravitate toward the lowest-earning majors like education, art and social work.

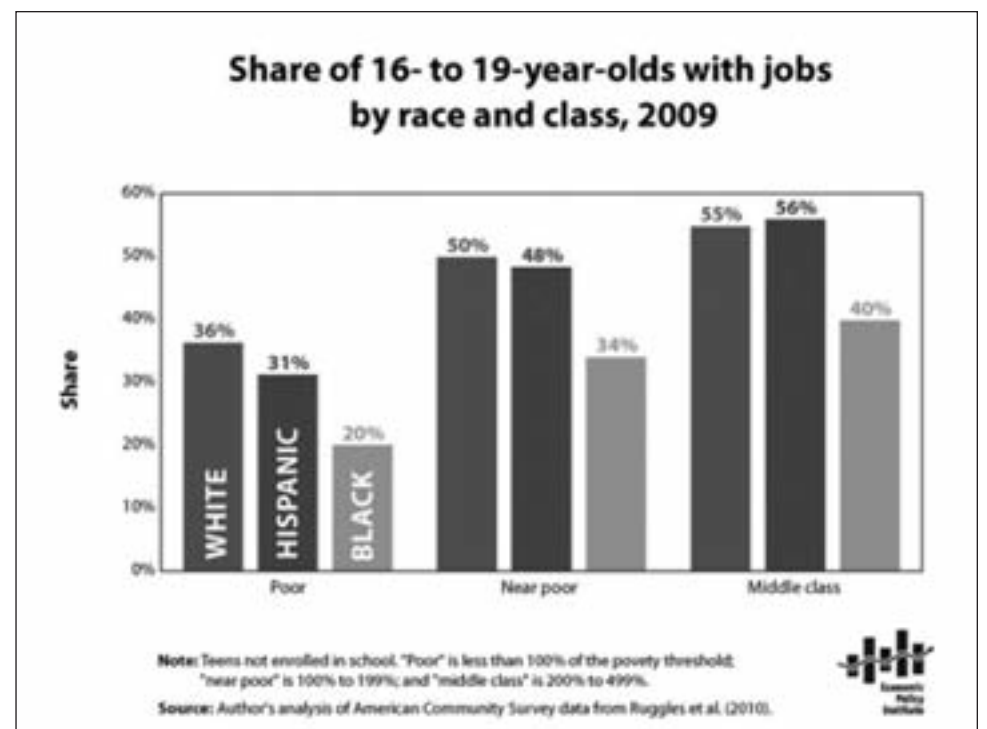
The report also categorized the 171 majors into 15 fields, discovering different majors led to different industries. About 43 percent of law and public policy majors end up in public administration, but only 13 percent of social science majors do. A higher portion of social science majors end up in finance, researchers found.

Other findings:

The most popular major group is business, accounting for 25 percent of all students. The least popular are industrial arts and agriculture, with 1.6 percent each.

White men have higher median earnings across all fields except three. Asians pull down the top median salaries in law and public policy (\$55,000), psychology and social work (\$48,000), and biology and life science (\$53,000).

The field with the highest concentrations of whites is agriculture and natural resources (90 percent), while the highest concentration of Asians is in computers and mathematics (16 percent). Law and public policy has the highest concentration of African-Americans (14 percent) and



Hispanics (10 percent).

Fields with virtually no unemployment: geological and geophysical engineering, military technologies, pharmacology and school student counseling.

Fields with the highest unemployment, ranging from 16 percent to 11 percent: social psychology, nuclear engineering, and educational administration and supervision.

The data is important considering the high cost of a college degree and the significant loan burdens taken on by some students to obtain one, Carnevale said.

"We don't have a system in the United States where we align what you take with career prospects," Carnevale said. "Nobody ever tells you when you go to college what

happened to the other people who took it before you."

The researchers' longitudinal look at lifetime earnings seems to echo a more short-term analysis of the job market by the National Association of Colleges and Employers.

The Bethlehem, Pa.-based group reports that engineering majors account for seven of the top 10 highest-paying majors for the class of 2011. The other three are computer science, information science and business systems networking/telecommunications.

Chemical engineering heads the list with an average salary offer of nearly \$67,000, according to the group's spring survey.

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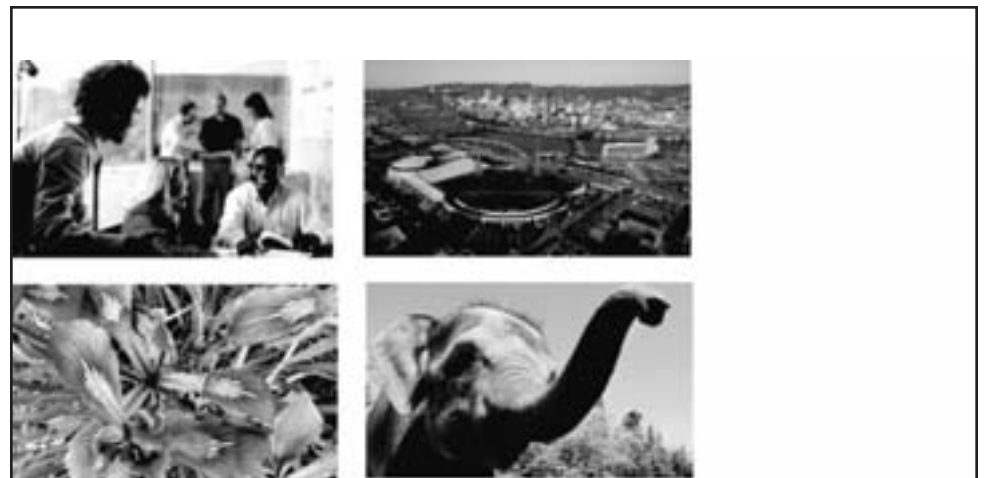
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