Nine Degrees That Put You on the Fast Track to $100K
by Monster Staff

Deciding on a college major is difficult -- should you follow your passions, or should you choose a four-year degree that promises to net a high salary? There are good arguments for both paths, but if you choose the latter, consider the disciplines on this list: the top nine four-year degrees that get top earners (for this list, that's the top 25 percent, or the 75th percentile) to $100,000 in a decade or less, according to the salary experts at PayScale.com. And here's a surprise: It's not just those often-touted engineering degrees that make the cut -- liberal-arts degrees are well-represented, too.

1. PETROLEUM ENGINEERING
75th Percentile Starting Pay: $108,000
Years for 75th Percentile to Reach $100K: 0 to 3
With the price of petroleum products at a premium, it's no wonder that people who know how to obtain oil earn high salaries. People with four-year petroleum-engineering degrees work at locating and analyzing reserves, making petroleum available through drilling and other means, refining petroleum, transporting it and more. After 10 to 12 years, 75th percentile earners in this field can expect to make $184,000 a year.

2. COMPUTER ENGINEERING
75th Percentile Starting Pay: $68,100
Years for 75th Percentile to Reach $100K: 7 to 9
Computer engineers usually have training in electronics, as well as hardware and software design. They are involved in many high-tech fields, working on designing everything from microprocessors to supercomputers. As computers become ever-more ubiquitous in our lives, computer engineers are found in an increasing number of industries. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), computer engineering will be among the fastest-growing occupations between 2008 and 2018. After 10 to 12 years on the job, the top 25% can expect to earn $114,000 a year.

3. ECONOMICS
75th Percentile Starting Pay: $56,100
Years for 75th Percentile to Reach $100K: 7 to 9
Economics is more than the study of money. In this discipline, you also learn about history, sociology and political science -- all of which affect economics at the micro and macro level. According to the Occupational Outlook Handbook, "rising demand for economic analysis in virtually every industry" should result in good job prospects for economists, especially in management, scientific and technical consulting services. Earners in the 75th percentile can expect to make $126,000 a year after 10 to 12 years.

4. CHEMICAL ENGINEERING
75th Percentile Starting Pay: $70,600
Years for 75th Percentile to Reach $100K: 10 to 12
Chemistry is at the root of just about everything, so getting a degree in chemical engineering doesn't necessarily mean you'll work in a laboratory environment. Graduates with this degree work not only in chemical manufacturing and R&D, but also in fields as diverse as medicine, architecture, green industries and food processing. The top 25% can expect salaries of $117,000/year after 10 to 12 years.
5. APPLIED MATHEMATICS

**75th Percentile Starting Pay:** $64,700  
**Years for 75th Percentile to Reach $100K:** 10 to 12

If you ever asked your math teacher, "Will we need this stuff in the real world?" Here's your answer. According to the BLS, people who study applied mathematics go on to use techniques such as mathematical modeling to solve problems in business, government and life. That can include roles such as helping companies streamline their manufacturing processes or analyzing the efficacy of a new pharmaceutical product. Salaries for the top 25% hit $115,000 after 10 to 12 years.

6. PHYSICS

**75th Percentile Starting Pay:** $59,800  
**Years for 75th Percentile to Reach $100K:** 10 to 12

According to the WorldWideLearn Web site, physics is better defined "as a way of thinking than as a profession. The field of physics trains students to take a logical, problem-solving approach in whatever situations they might find themselves." People with physics degrees work in medicine, education, finance and other fields. The 75th percentile earners can expect to make $112,000/year after 10 to 12 years.

7. STATISTICS

**75th Percentile Starting Pay:** $58,500  
**Years for 75th Percentile to Reach $100K:** 10 to 12

In just about any industry, statisticians are employed to gather and interpret data. The BLS forecasts average job growth for statisticians between 2008 and 2018, but a degree in statistics is a good foundation for any job that deals with data analysis. After 10 to 12 years, the 75th percentile can expect to make $139,000 annually.

8. FINANCE

**75th Percentile Starting Pay:** $54,400  
**Years for 75th Percentile to Reach $100K:** 10 to 12

If you get this degree, employers will really "show you the money." A finance degree is designed to provide broad knowledge in areas such as corporate finance, the banking system, accounting and financial analysis. People with a finance degree find entry-level jobs in industries such as banking, insurance and government. The top 25% can expect to earn $111,000 a year after 10 to 12 years.

9. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

**75th Percentile Starting Pay:** $49,100  
**Years for 75th Percentile to Reach $100K:** 10 to 12

This liberal-arts degree, which covers a broad range of study, gives students a wide knowledge base that can be applied to a diverse array of occupations in foreign service, business, journalism or market research, for instance. Fluency in at least one foreign language will increase opportunities for graduates with this degree. After 10 to 12 years, the 75th percentile can expect to earn $114,000 a year.

**Methodology:** Salary data provided by PayScale.com. This study includes only people with bachelor's degrees as their highest level of education. Salaries listed include annual salary or hourly wage plus any bonuses, profit sharing, tips, commissions and other forms of cash earnings. Seventy-fifth percentile pay is a benchmark for the top earners: 25% will earn more, while 75% will earn less. The figure "10 to 12 years" indicates the number of years respondents have spent in the field/career; therefore, years of experience will incorporate all applicable jobs in the field, not just the current job.

http://career-services.monster.com/yahooarticle/100K-jobs-by-college-major