# 2026
## Salary Survey

nace
national association of
colleges + employers

# About the Survey

The *Winter 2026 Salary Survey* report contains annual salary projections for Class of 2026 college graduates. The figures reported are for base salaries only and do not include bonuses, commissions, fringe benefits, or overtime rates. The report provides the detailed salary projections by academic major and degree level, along with breakouts by both industry and geographic region.

Data contained in the report were obtained by surveying NACE employer members from October 8, 2025, through November 30, 2025. A total of 150 surveys were returned—a 20.3% response rate. Of those responding, 9.3% were from the New England region, 9.3% were from the Plains, 8.7% were from the Rocky Mountain/Far West, 16.1% were from the Southwest, 12% were from the Southeast, 15.3% were from the Mideast, and 29.3% were from the Great Lakes. A list of respondents by industry and a partial list of organizations that supplied data for this report can be found in the appendix.

Salary Survey (ISSN 1520-8648) is available to individuals holding membership in the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE); it is also available on a subscription basis. The *Salary Survey* report is published two times a year—January and August—by NACE. For more information, see www.naceweb.org/store/subscription/salary-survey/ or contact NACE at 610.868.1421.

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# Salary Survey Issues for the Class of 2026

The winter issue features starting salary projections by major from employer-provided data. The *Winter 2026 Salary Survey* is the first report for the Class of 2026. Data are available by major, job function, industry, and region. There are also data for advanced-degree candidates—the report includes data for 27 master's and six doctoral degree disciplines.

The summer issue serves as the final report for the graduating class—the previous year's class, that is. The report features data provided through the national *First-Destination Survey* initiative; the data represent actual starting salaries (not projections) reported by graduates to their institutions. Data are reported by major, region, and Carnegie Classification. The *Summer 2026 Salary Survey* is the final report on starting salaries for the Class of 2025. The *Summer 2027 Salary Survey* will serve as the final report for the Class of 2026.

## SALARY DATA FOR THE CLASS OF 2026

| REPORT | WHAT | DATA SOURCE |
|---|---|---|
| First Report – Winter 2026 | Pre-graduation projected starting salaries | Employers |
| Final Report – Summer 2027 | Final results, post-graduation actual starting salaries | First-Destination Survey (Students/Schools) |

# Winter 2026 *Salary Survey* Key Insights

## BACHELOR'S DEGREE GRADUATES

+ Starting salary projections show promise for the upcoming Class of 2026. Nearly all categories of reported majors are showing healthy increases that range from 3.1% for engineering majors to 6.9% for computer sciences majors. The only category with lower projected salaries is social sciences; their average salary is expected to decrease by 1.7%.

+ Boosted by the largest projected increase in starting salaries, the overall average salary for computer sciences graduates stands at $81,535, making this the top-paid category of majors. **(See Figure 1.)** This year's projected increase of 6.9% far exceeds last year's projected increase of 2%.

+ Engineering graduates are projected to be the second highest-paid category of majors for the Class of 2026 with an overall average that is up 3.1%, from $78,731 last year to $81,198. Within the 15 reported individual engineering majors, all are projected to increase except for engineering technology majors, although their overall average salary projection is down less than 1%, from $77,815 to $77,294. The highest-paid individual engineering major is petroleum engineering, posting an average salary projection of $100,750.

+ Math and sciences graduates are expected to be the third highest-paid majors for the Class of 2026, with their overall average salary projection rising 6.4%, from $69,709 last year to $74,184. This comes in contrast to a projected decrease of nearly 2% for the Class of 2025.

+ Graduates earning business degrees from the Class of 2026 are projected to receive salaries that average more than last year. Their overall average salary shows a solid increase of 5.5%, bumping up from $65,276 to $68,873. Sales ($67,927), business administration/management ($68,831), and marketing ($66,994) show the largest individual projected increases of 8.3%, 8.4%, and 8.5%, respectively. Additionally, the only major reporting a projected decrease is hospitality management, with the average salary projection dropping 2.1%, from $65,000 to $63,638.

+ Business, engineering, and computer sciences disciplines dominate the list of specific bachelor's degree majors in demand. At least 60% of respondents have plans to hire finance, mechanical engineering, and computer science majors from the Class of 2026. **(See Figure 2.)**

## Average salaries by discipline, bachelor's degrees

| BROAD CATEGORY | 2026 SALARY PROJECTION | 2025 SALARY PROJECTION | % CHANGE |
|---|---|---|---|
| Computer Sciences | $81,535 | $76,251 | 6.9% |
| Engineering | $81,198 | $78,731 | 3.1% |
| Mathematics and Statistics | $74,184 | $69,709 | 6.4% |
| Business | $68,873 | $65,276 | 5.5% |
| Agriculture and Natural Resources | $67,154 | $63,122 | 6.4% |
| Social Sciences | $66,155 | $67,316 | -1.7% |
| Communications | $63,767 | $60,353 | 5.7% |

→ **FIGURE 2**

## Top degrees in demand (bachelor's degree level)

| MAJOR | # OF RESPONDENTS THAT WILL HIRE | % OF TOTAL RESPONDENTS THAT WILL HIRE |
|---|---|---|
| Finance | 92 | 61.3% |
| Mechanical Engineering | 92 | 61.3% |
| Computer Science | 90 | 60.0% |
| Accounting | 88 | 58.7% |
| Business Administration/Management | 88 | 58.7% |
| Electrical Engineering | 77 | 51.3% |
| Information Sciences and Systems | 72 | 48.0% |
| Logistics/Supply Chain | 67 | 44.7% |
| Marketing | 66 | 44.0% |
| Human Resources | 60 | 40.0% |

## MASTER'S DEGREE GRADUATES

+ While Class of 2025 engineering graduates were the highest paid at the master's degree level last year, the top-paid spot for the Class of 2026 goes to computer sciences graduates. **(See Figure 3.)** Their overall average has reached $94,212, representing a projected increase of 10.9% over last year's average of $84,960. This large increase comes in contrast to last year's small decrease of -0.5%.

+ Although they are the second highest-paid master's degree graduates this year, Class of 2026 engineering majors still have a high salary projection of $92,873, despite the fact that their average is 1.3% lower than last year's average of $94,086. The good news, however, is that last year's average grew 12.5% compared to the Class of 2024.

+ Half of the individual reported engineering disciplines show projected decreases, ranging from -12.2% for engineering technology ($98,750 to $86,680) to -2% for mechanical engineering graduates ($90,227 to $88,403). In addition to those decreases, computer engineering (-7.1%), software engineering (-5.7%), and systems engineering (-8.3%) show decreased salary projections after having inflated projected increases of 21.5%, 20.8%, and 24.8%, respectively, last year.

+ Data for math and sciences graduates at the master's degree level continue to be very limited, with less than 10 reported salary projections. However, last year's projected decrease of almost -10% has changed direction to an increase of 8%.

+ The average salary projection for business degree graduates at the master's degree level shows a double-digit increase, rising 11.5% from $77,632 last year to $86,563. This follows an average increase of just 3.1% for last year's Class of 2025 business graduates.

+ Except for actuarial science, all reported individual business majors are showing higher projected salaries for Class of 2026 master's degree graduates. Business administration/management (M.B.A.) graduates have one of the largest projected increases, bringing their average salary up almost 15%, from $85,842 to $98,514. Marketing majors at this degree level also appear to be driving the business group upward, with an increase of 15.8%, from $76,133 last year to $88,125.

+ Top master's degrees in demand are similar in nature to their bachelor's degree counterparts as computer sciences, engineering, and business fields top the list. **(See Figure 4.)**

→ **FIGURE 3**

## Average salaries by discipline, master's degrees

| BROAD CATEGORY | 2026 SALARY PROJECTION | 2025 SALARY PROJECTION | % CHANGE |
|---|---|---|---|
| Computer Sciences | $94,212 | $84,960 | 10.9% |
| Engineering | $92,873 | $94,086 | -1.3% |
| Business | $86,563 | $77,632 | 11.5% |
| Mathematics and Statistics | $81,129 | $75,140 | 8.0% |

→ **FIGURE 4**

## Top degrees in demand (master's degree level)

| MAJOR | # OF RESPONDENTS THAT WILL HIRE | % OF TOTAL RESPONDENTS THAT WILL HIRE |
|---|---|---|
| Computer Science | 37 | 24.7% |
| Mechanical Engineering | 30 | 20.0% |
| Business Administration/Mgmt. – M.B.A. | 28 | 18.7% |
| Finance | 26 | 17.3% |
| Electrical Engineering | 26 | 17.3% |
| Accounting | 24 | 16.0% |
| Information Sciences and Systems | 22 | 14.7% |
| Software Engineering | 22 | 14.7% |
| Computer Engineering | 20 | 13.3% |
| Human Resources | 18 | 12.0% |

## DOCTORAL DEGREE GRADUATES

+ Data at the doctoral degree level are extremely limited this year, and the two reported categories of majors have less than 20 salary projections. Therefore, the salaries should be read with caution. In both cases, Class of 2026 graduates earning computer sciences and engineering degrees have decreasing salary projections.

+ The average salary projection for computer sciences ($121,667) is -4.2% lower than last year's average of $127,017. Meanwhile, engineering graduates earning doctoral degrees are projected to receive salaries that are down -7.2% as their average salary projection has dropped from $126,428 to $117,375. (See Figure 5.) While computer sciences is the highest-paid category, this is the second consecutive year for a decrease, following last year's decline of -9.2%.

+ Class of 2025 engineering graduates, saw positive movement to their average salaries last year, which were expected to increase by almost 11%. However, within individual reported engineering majors, computer engineering ($116,667), software engineering ($120,000), and electrical engineering ($115,500) are pushing the overall average downward for the Class of 2026 with double-digit decreases of -21.1%, -19.1%, and -16%, respectively.

→ **FIGURE 5**

## Average salaries by discipline, doctoral degrees

| BROAD CATEGORY | 2026 SALARY PROJECTION | 2025 SALARY PROJECTION | % CHANGE |
|---|---|---|---|
| Computer Sciences | $121,667 | $127,017 | -4.2% |
| Engineering | $117,375 | $126,428 | -7.2% |

## JOB POSITIONS

+ Physical scientists ($82,766) top the list of highest-paid job positions at the bachelor's degree level for the Class of 2026. With the exception of environmental and conservation scientists, all reported positions are showing higher salary projections compared to last year. **(See Figure 6.)**

+ Not surprisingly, the average salary projection for physical scientist positions shows one of the largest increases (10.2%). This was also the case last year when physical scientist positions had the largest projected increase at 13.9%.

+ Computer occupations—the second highest-paid positions at an average of $82,194—saw significant growth in their salary projection for the Class of 2026 (9.1%) from that for the Class of 2025 (1.2%).

+ Other positions that are showing higher projected salary increases compared to last year are mathematical occupations (a -3.1% decrease last year to a 5.3% increase this year); sales positions (5.2% increase last year to a 12.3% increase this year); and communications positions, e.g., public relations specialists, writers/editors, interpreters/translators, and film and video editors (a 1.1% increase last year to an 8% increase this year).

→ **FIGURE 6**

## Bachelor's degree salary projections by job position

| JOB POSITION | 2026 SALARY PROJECTION | 2025 SALARY PROJECTION | % CHANGE |
|---|---|---|---|
| Physical Scientists (Physicists, Chemists, Materials Scientists, Geologists) | $82,766 | $75,094 | 10.2% |
| Computer Occupations (Systems Analysts, Programmers, Software Developers, Network Specialists) | $82,194 | $75,362 | 9.1% |
| Engineering (Engineers, Technicians) | $80,167 | $78,241 | 2.5% |
| Environmental and Conservation Scientists | $72,628 | $79,875 | -9.1% |
| Mathematical Occupations (Actuaries, Mathematicians, Statisticians) | $71,225 | $67,613 | 5.3% |
| Sales | $70,723 | $62,557 | 12.3% |
| Financial Specialists (Accountants/Auditors, Financial Analysts, Tax Specialists) | $67,554 | $66,528 | 1.5% |
| Business Operations (Buyers, Adjusters, HR, Logistics, Training Specialists, Marketing) | $66,645 | $63,998 | 4.1% |
| Communications (Public Relations Specialists, Writers/Editors, Interpreters/Translators, Film and Video Editors) | $66,527 | $61,598 | 8.0% |
| Office and Administrative Support | $64,289 | $59,692 | 7.7% |

# Appendix

## Respondents by industry

| INDUSTRY | # OF RESPONDENTS | % OF RESPONDENTS |
|---|---:|---:|
| Oil and Gas Extraction | 1 | 0.7% |
| Utilities | 9 | 6.0% |
| Construction | 9 | 6.0% |
| Food and Beverage Manufacturing | 7 | 4.7% |
| Chemical (Pharmaceutical) Manufacturing | 11 | 7.3% |
| Computer and Electronics Manufacturing | 13 | 8.7% |
| Motor Vehicle Manufacturing | 5 | 3.3% |
| Miscellaneous Manufacturing | 20 | 13.3% |
| Wholesale Trade | 10 | 6.7% |
| Retail Trade | 4 | 2.7% |
| Transportation | 2 | 1.3% |
| Messaging and Warehouse | 1 | 0.7% |
| Information | 6 | 4.0% |
| Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate | 17 | 11.3% |
| Accounting Services | 3 | 2.0% |
| Engineering Services | 12 | 8.0% |
| Management Consulting | 4 | 2.7% |
| Miscellaneous Professional Services | 5 | 3.3% |
| Social Services | 2 | 1.3% |
| Recreation and Hospitality | 2 | 1.3% |
| Miscellaneous Support Services | 4 | 2.7% |
| Government | 3 | 2.0% |
| | 150 | 100.0% |

# Participating Organizations

Below is a list of the organizations that supplied salary projections for the NACE Winter 2026 Salary Survey. (Please note: Although 150 organizations responded, the list below includes 101, as 49 organizations preferred not to be listed.)

| | |
|---|---|
| Abbott | Central Plateau Cleanup Company |
| AbbVie | Charles River Laboratories |
| Acron Aviation | Charter Manufacturing Company, Inc. |
| American Axle & Manufacturing | Chevron |
| American Electric Power | Chubb |
| American Heart Association | Church & Dwight |
| Andersen Corporation | Conagra Brands |
| Armstrong World Industries | Constellation Energy |
| Astronautics Corporation of America | Construction Solutions Group |
| ATA Engineering, Inc. | Cornerstone Controls |
| Avient Corporation | CVS Health |
| Ayres Associates | Daimler Truck North America |
| Basin Electric Power Cooperative | DiamondBack Covers |
| Belden Inc. | DN Tanks LLC |
| Bozzuto | Eagle Materials Inc. |
| Buro Happold | Enercon Services |
| CannonDesign | EOG Resources |
| Cardinal Health | Ferguson |
| Carnival Cruise Line | Fifth Third Bank |
| Cemex | First Solar |

Foth

Freeman

Freese and Nichols

GE Aerospace

General Dynamics - Electric Boat

General Dynamics Mission Systems

Genworth Financial

Ghafari Associates LLC

GHD

Henkel

HNI Corporation

Hormel Foods Corporation

HP Inc

IGS Energy

Ingredion Incorporated

JE Dunn Construction

Johnson Controls Inc.

Kohl's

KPMG

L'Oreal USA

Land O'Lakes

Liberty Mutual Insurance

LPL Financial

McDermott International, Ltd

Medtronic

Metallus Inc.

Milwaukee Tool

New York Life

Olin Corporation

Olympus Corporation of the Americas

ONEOk

PEPSICO

Phillips 66

Phillips Edison & Company

Progressive Insurance

Protiviti

RoviSys

RS&H

Salas O'Brien Engineering Inc

Seagate Technology

Selden Fox, Ltd.

Sequel Med Tech

Smith and Nephew

Southern Company

Southwest Airlines

Spectrum

Steelcase

Sun Pharmaceutical Industries, Inc.

Synovus Bank

T-Mobile

Textron

The Aerospace Corporation

The Walsh Group

Tokio Marine HCC

Uline

United Launch Alliance

Verisk Analytics

Verizon

VHB

Watts Water

Zions Bancorporation

# About NACE

Established in 1956, the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) connects more than 17,600 career services and early talent recruiting professionals, as well as the business solution providers that serve this community.

NACE believes in a world that is unifying in approach and where equal opportunity and access exist for all.