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Lucrative degrees for college grads

Average starting salaries for class of '05 higher -- in some cases notably -- than last year.

April 16, 2005: 12:45 PM EDT

By Jeanne Sahadi, CNN/Money senior writer

NEW YORK (CNN/Money) ? This year's college grads have an edge over the class that preceded them when it comes to that all-important first paycheck.

Employers are paying more in starting salaries overall than they did with the class of 2003-2004, according to the spring salary survey from the National Association of Colleges and Employers.

And there are early indications that employers will be hiring more college grads this year. NACE will release exact numbers in its Job Outlook survey next month.

Sure, there are a few majors that are seeing slight declines in starting salaries compared with last year. Namely, the starting salary for computer engineering jobs is down 2 percent; and the starting pay for information science jobs is down 0.8 percent.

But many have seen significant increases. Aerospace and aeronautical engineering majors, for instance, are enjoying a 9 percent increase in starting salaries; marketing majors have seen a 6 percent increase in starting salaries; while economics and finance majors are getting paid 5.1 percent more than last year.

Meanwhile, chemical, mechanical and civil engineers are also seeing paychecks that are at least 4 percent higher.

Even liberal arts grads as a group ? those notoriously low-paid first-timers in the workforce ? are enjoying a bump in pay of 4.2 percent, albeit to what is still one of the lowest starting salaries out there -- \$30,337.

Which jobs are most offered?

In a separate part of its survey, NACE asked employers which jobs they have offered the most so far this year and what their starting salaries were. They are:

- Accounting (private): \$44,564


- Management trainee: \$35,811
- Teaching: \$29,733
- Consulting: \$49,781
- Sales: \$37,130
- Accounting (public): \$41,039
- Financial/Treasury analysis: \$45,596
- Software design/development: \$53,729
- Design/construction engineering: \$47,058
- Registered nurse: \$38,775

All of the salaries quoted are national averages. The NACE survey looked at starting pay in 70 disciplines at the bachelor's degree level.

NACE conducts its surveys quarterly. Final numbers for starting salaries for the class of 2004-05 (which includes any college student who graduated between Sept. 1, 2004 through Aug. 31, 2005) will be out in September. ■

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