

Table 5

Percentage Differences in Expected Earnings Relative to Comparable Political Science Majors, 2009–14

| | All Degree Levels | | | | Bachelor's Degree Only |
|---|-------------------|---------|----------------------|---------|------------------------|
| | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 | Model 5 |
| Engineering | 13.5 | 26.5 | 16.3 | 20.1 | 19.7 |
| Economics | 11.1 | 20.2 | 15.4 | 13.1 | 10.8 |
| Biology | 4.0 | -2.5 | -0.5 ^{N.S.} | 4.9 | -3.6 |
| Physical Sciences | 3.3 | 4.6 | 0.3 ^{N.S.} | 5.3 | -0.5 ^{N.S.} |
| Mathematics and Statistics | 1.7 | 8.7 | 5.6 | 9.6 | 10.5 |
| Political Science | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| Computer Science | -3.0 | 13.3 | 10.9 | 15.8 | 14.3 |
| Business | -13.3 | 1.8 | 0.3 ^{N.S.} | 3.6 | 2.1 |
| History | -13.6 | -10.7 | -13.0 | -10.4 | -12.0 |
| Health Sciences | -13.8 | -4.8 | 3.1 | 14.1 | 16.3 |
| Architecture | -15.7 | -5.0 | -8.8 | -6.1 | -3.3 |
| Philosophy and Religion | -20.9 | -21.0 | -22.7 | -19.5 | -17.6 |
| Other Social Sciences | -22.8 | -15.6 | -14.4 | -9.9 | -11.4 |
| Environment | -23.9 | -12.8 | -18.0 | -11.2 | -12.0 |
| English | -24.1 | -19.0 | -15.2 | -12.0 | -11.7 |
| Interdisciplinary Studies | -24.1 | -17.1 | -10.9 | -6.3 | -8.1 |
| Languages | -25.1 | -21.0 | -15.5 | -12.5 | -12.8 |
| Agriculture | -26.7 | -16.9 | -22.3 | -17.1 | -19.2 |
| Communications | -26.9 | -14.1 | -9.4 | -6.2 | -6.1 |
| Psychology | -27.3 | -22.5 | -16.4 | -11.3 | -11.9 |
| Liberal Arts and Humanities | -28.2 | -17.9 | -16.0 | -12.4 | -13.4 |
| Criminal Justice | -29.5 | -17.1 | -15.4 | -10.0 | -9.9 |
| Sociology | -29.9 | -21.6 | -15.8 | -11.5 | -11.5 |
| Physical Fitness | -35.4 | -26.3 | -22.1 | -15.7 | -18.1 |
| Education | -37.4 | -30.9 | -27.2 | -21.1 | -22.5 |
| Fine Arts | -38.1 | -27.8 | -23.4 | -19.5 | -18.8 |
| Social Work | -41.0 | -34.3 | -26.7 | -19.2 | -20.2 |
| Theology | -45.3 | -39.9 | -44.6 | -39.5 | -36.1 |
| Model controls for: | | | | | |
| Educational Attainment | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Race, gender, age, veteran, year | No | No | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Hours worked, state | No | No | No | Yes | Yes |
| Observations: 1,808,514 (1,102,644 for bachelor's only model) | | | | | |

All differences from political science are significant at the .0001 level unless indicated by ^{N.S.}

Occupations

Although career guidance for political science majors (e.g., American Political Science Association 2001; Clark 2004) typically emphasizes government careers, three-quarters of political science majors work in the private sector. The most common jobs of those with bachelor's degrees are in management and sales (table 3). Government jobs include public administrators, police officers, and primary school teachers. Those with master's degrees are most typically in management or education, and most of those with professional degrees or doctorates work as lawyers, though management is also common.

Earnings

Political science majors with bachelor's degrees earn, on average, 67% more than comparable high school graduates; those with master's, professional, and doctoral degrees earn 99%, 170%, and 128% more than high school graduates, respectively (not shown). Table 4 shows mean earnings by major, and model 1 of table 5 shows percentage differences from political science majors, controlling for year; only engineering, economics, biology, and physics majors earn more. Political science majors' mean salaries are slightly higher than those for computer science and business majors and are 20% to 30% higher than for those in English, communications, psychology, criminal justice, and sociology.

One reason is political science majors' high educational attainment. When model 2 controls for degree, most majors' pay rises by at least 10% relative to political science. Individual demographics also explain some of the pay advantage in the most lucrative majors. Engineering, computer science, and economics majors are disproportionately male, white, and Asian (appendix table 4), groups that tend to earn higher salaries overall; when those factors are controlled in model 3, the pay differential shrinks (see appendix table 5). The pay advantage to majoring in the health sciences jumps, however, because of their over-representation of women, blacks, and Latinos.²

Adding hours worked and state of employment also shifts political science majors downward (model 4), partly because they are among the four majors who work the longest hours and the three majors who work in the highest-paying states. (In particular, 5.4% of political science majors work in Washington, DC, 4.6 times the rate for college graduates overall and nearly twice the rate even for economics and foreign language majors.) With all these variables in the model, political science majors earn 10% to 20% less than engineering, computer science, health science, economics, and math majors, but only 4% less than business majors and at least 10% more than those in other social sciences and the humanities.