

HOT Careers

A SPECIAL REPORT FOR RECENT AND MID-CAREER COLLEGE GRADUATES

for College Grads and Returning Students 2013

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Introduction

Bridging from college to career is not always easy, and this is especially true for recent college graduates. In an effort to provide guidance and information to assist with important decisions about career choices, UC San Diego Extension has assembled the fifth annual edition of “Hot Careers for College Graduates.” As a division of one of the leading research universities in the United States, Extension leadership possesses unique insights into the ever-changing global economic trends that shape the contemporary job market. A key role for us is sharing timely, accurate, useful assessments of rapidly changing employment opportunities for recent college graduates in such breakthrough career paths as life sciences, technology, and health care.

The forces that have most affected job demand and employment trends in the past five years have been the economic recession that began in 2008, a global expansion in access to and use of the Internet, and the beginning of a retirement wave by the baby boom generation. These changes have influenced the types of jobs that are available, as well as the skills needed to fill such positions. Leading institutions such as UC San Diego are committed to providing students with information and skills that will assist them as they transition from higher education into fulfilling careers. We fulfill this responsibility gladly.

College students in their final year are sometimes so focused on completing degree requirements, they may have difficulty planning for anything beyond graduation, much less exploring potential career paths. It may take months after graduation for students to begin to investigate and discern ways to leverage a degree in the liberal arts into fulfilling careers. In recent years, with the labor market especially tight, media reports have focused on those who become discouraged about employment prospects and take a low paying job which may not utilize the knowledge they accumulated while earning their degrees.

Throughout UC San Diego Extension’s decades of providing post-baccalaureate education, we have observed an increasing number of students who need help bridging from college to their selected employment field. We are committed to helping students searching for careers to hone their skills and supplement their degrees with additional practical training that will allow them to explore, not only traditional job opportunities, but also emerging career pathways. We also help them access expertise and create the connections and networks that can ease their transitions.

To do this in a timely and effective way, UC San Diego Extension has assembled an in-house research team under my direction that focuses on identifying and tracking the socioeconomic trends that affect regional economies—in particular, the multiple dynamic forces that affect entry-level career requirements, and profiles the skills needed to successfully pursue fulfilling, meaningful post-graduation careers.

This report uses an algorithm to identify and rank a list of “hot career” categories that can realistically be filled by recent college graduates. Some careers on the list require additional non-graduate-level training beyond a bachelor’s degree, but do not typically require a master’s or doctorate degree. This is why some hard-to-fill jobs such as surgeon, veterinarian, and electrical engineer are not included in the list, despite the fact that they are high-paying careers that almost always present more job openings than applicants.

The research team has instead identified and ranked jobs in fields that can be reasonably obtained by a person with a bachelor’s degree, augmented by additional education or on-the-job training. As the continuing education arm of the university, one of our central missions is to help college graduates find ways into careers that utilize their talents, offer sustained opportunities for growth, and, of course, are in demand. We know it is possible for college grads to bridge to high quality, high paying jobs when they improve their job-ready skills and networks through continuing education.

We are convinced this strategy has value based on our more than 63,000 enrollees annually in about 4,300 courses. We are known globally for leadership in designing programs which link members of the public with the expert knowledge, leading professionals, and cutting-edge resources associated with the University of California.

For the past five years, the research team within UC San Diego Extension has deeply invested in providing the general public with the most in-depth, up-to-date research and analysis regarding the economic forces and employment trends that shape the opportunities available to recent college graduates. I would like to acknowledge Henry DeVries, MBA, our assistant dean for external relations, for leading this effort, and especially Josh Shapiro, Ph.D., sociology, and Sundari Baru, Ph.D., economics, for collecting the data and performing the algorithmic analyses for this year's report. Their work was informed by all the academic directors of UC San Diego Extension, and the write-up of our results by Henry DeVries was significantly aided by Denise Montgomery, MA, and Tara Davies, UC San Diego Extension's social media fellow.

Sincerely,



Mary L. Walshok, Ph.D.
Associate Vice Chancellor of Public Programs and Dean of Extension

Methodology

Just what constitutes a “Hot Career”?

Wage and employment data from the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics’ (BLS) Occupational Employment Statistics determine the foundational parameters of the “hot career” designation. The search began with a core list of careers that currently employ more than 150,000 people. A subset of occupations in which at least 25 percent of current employees held bachelor’s degrees was then extracted, using the Bureau of Labor’s O*NET Online.

This list was then scored in four criteria categories: current employment in the field, projected growth in the occupation between 2010 and 2020, median annual salary in the occupation, and workplace environment characteristics. The desirability of the work environment includes such factors such as duration of work week, level of competition, time pressure, consequences of errors, and time spent standing. Each category was assigned equal weight, with a maximal potential category score of twenty-five (25), making one hundred (100) the highest potential cumulative score for each career. The cumulative score was then used to determine the rankings of the occupations in the Hot Careers list. A fifth dimension, “bridgeability,” was applied as a simple criterion to include or exclude a given career from this particular list, but did not affect the weighted total score of the career. Its sole purpose was to eliminate careers that recent college graduates could not easily “bridge to” with minimal or no training beyond an undergraduate degree.

Using this methodology reveals there is a clear pattern in where employment opportunities are growing. The data analysis revealed ten major employment sectors with strong career potential. Overall the study indicated an increasing national demand for college graduates with skills in computer sciences and analysis or problem solving.

Results

Here is what the algorithm revealed about what constitutes a hot career in today’s world for recent and mid-career college graduates. The table below shows how the top eighteen careers, labeled by Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) code, were scored and ranked:

| SOC code* | Occupation Title | Current Employment | Projected Growth | Median Wage | Work Environment | TOTAL POINTS |
|-----------|--|--------------------|------------------|-------------|------------------|--------------|
| 15-1132 | Software Developers, Applications | 15 | 17.5 | 20 | 18.90 | 71.4 |
| 15-1133 | Software Developers, Systems Software | 10 | 22.5 | 20 | 18.90 | 71.4 |
| 13-1161 | Market Research Analysts | 10 | 25 | 15 | 19.51 | 69.5 |
| 13-2011 | Accountants and Auditors | 22.5 | 10 | 15 | 19.51 | 67.0 |
| 15-1142 | Network and Computer Systems Admin | 10 | 17.5 | 20 | 18.90 | 66.4 |
| 25-2021 | Elementary School Teachers | 25 | 10 | 15 | 15.24 | 65.2 |
| 15-1121 | Computer Systems Analysts | 10 | 15 | 20 | 18.29 | 63.3 |
| 13-1111 | Managements Analysts | 10 | 15 | 20 | 17.07 | 62.1 |
| 27-3031 | Public Relations Specialists | 5 | 15 | 20 | 18.29 | 58.3 |
| 41-3021 | Insurance Sales Agents | 10 | 15 | 15 | 18.29 | 58.3 |
| 13-2051 | Financial Analysts | 5 | 15 | 20 | 17.68 | 57.7 |
| 15-1131 | Computer Programmers | 10 | 7.5 | 20 | 18.90 | 56.4 |
| 41-4011 | Sales Representatives, Wholesale and Manufacturing, Technical and Scientific | 10 | 10 | 20 | 15.85 | 55.9 |
| 41-3031 | Securities, Commodities, and Financial Services Sales Agents | 10 | 10 | 20 | 14.63 | 54.6 |
| 23-2011 | Paralegals and Legal Assistants | 10 | 12.5 | 15 | 17.07 | 54.6 |
| 25-2022 | Middle School Teachers | 15 | 17.5 | 15 | 14.02 | 54.0 |
| 13-1151 | Training and Development Specialists | 5 | 17.5 | 15 | 16.46 | 54.0 |
| 13-1071 | Human Resource Specialists | 10 | 12.5 | 15 | 15.24 | 52.7 |

*Standard Occupational Classification Code

The first column in the chart is the classification code for each job as determined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics for the Occupational Employment Statistics Database. Note: Career fields contain various jobs, and the researchers looked at both jobs and careers. Each job was scored on the four categories as follows:

- 1. Current rates of employment.** A total of 25 points were possible for this category based on current levels of employment data released by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.
- 2. Projected growth for jobs in the field.** A total of 25 points were possible based on projections of growth in these occupations between 2010 and 2020 from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.
- 3. Median wage for jobs in the field.** A total of 25 points were possible based on data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.
- 4. Typical work environments in the field.** A total of 25 points were possible for this composite of nine descriptors from various secondary research sources designed to capture the attractiveness of the workplace environment for the various occupations. The nine factors considered were duration of typical work week, level of competition, frequency of conflict situations, indoor/environmentally controlled environment, time pressure, need to deal with unpleasant or angry people, responsibility for others’ health and safety, consequences of errors, and time spent standing.
- 5. Bridgeability factor.** This was a simple “yes or no,” “in or out” decision based on whether a college graduate could bridge into the career with one or two years of study or reskilling. This is the reason excellent health care/medical jobs such as registered nurse, medical scientist, veterinarian, optometrist, and pharmacist did not make this hot careers list.

Top Ten Hot Careers for 2013

1. Software Developers/Applications (tie for number one)

Software developers top the list of ten hot careers for 2013. The ranking algorithm resulted in a statistical tie between two distinct subsets of software developers: applications and systems software (occupational categories 15-1132 and 15-1133 in the U.S. Standard Occupational Classification [SOC], which enables direct comparison of disparate job categories and classifications).

The rapid widespread adoption and integration of information resource technology into the daily fabric of life, from personal computers to security equipment to automobiles, consumer electronics and smartphones has created an ongoing critical shortage of qualified software developers to design, develop, test, document and maintain the complex programs that run on these hardware platforms. Military, health care, finance, communications, security, aerospace, science and education are industries with ongoing urgent needs for software development, but nearly every other sector, from small businesses to service industries, also leverage computer and software applications to streamline operations, manage and mine vast amounts of data, maintain and optimize labor and supply chains, and so on. Within the past five years, the growing proliferation of smart phone and tablet applications has also increased demand for software developers.

Beginning with user needs analysis, software developers create application code to solve specific problems through a series of complex, interlocking, often shifting requirements. Job activities may include breaking down problems into logical subsets, exploring existing software code, considering the implications of introducing additional functionality, designing software with flowcharts and other tools, directing teams of coders, testing and verifying code, and writing code themselves. The research shows the number of employed applications software developers outnumbers the systems software developers, 586,340 to 391,700. Although the demand for applications software developers is higher, systems software developers have a better projected employment growth rate (32 percent by 2020 versus 28 percent by 2020 for the applications software developers) as well as a higher mean annual salary (\$102,550, almost \$5,000 more for the applications software developer).

The title of software developer can apply to a multitude of positions that employ principles of engineering, mathematics, and computer science, whether in the creation or in the testing of software. According to the Standard Occupation Classification (SOC) Code, the difference between these types of software developers is that the applications software developers are more focused on the consumer side of the software development, testing and modifying the product to ensure the desired results, and the systems software developer's role pertains to the formulation and analysis of software requirements. A bachelor's degree in computer science or mathematics, as well as strong programming skills, are what an applicant usually needs for a job as an applications software developer.

2. Software Developers/Systems Software (tie for number one)

As mentioned above, software developers of systems software are tied for the number one position on the hot careers list. The field has a smaller number of current employees but a larger projected growth rate than software developers of applications. The mean average annual salary is \$93,280.

While software developers of applications design and implement the software behind computer applications for consumers (examples of these types of software are word processors or games, more specifically, something used by a person), systems software developers design, analyze, and install software that commands the way a computer functions, meaning the computer's operating system. Sometimes a systems software developer will also be responsible for designing an interface system that allows a user to utilize the software of the system as well.

Systems software developers are responsible for creating the operating systems that allow the most popular tech devices to run smoothly. The software developers of applications would have no place for the apps they design if the operating systems that the apps run on and supplement were not first.

Similar to applications software developers, software developers of systems software usually need to have a bachelor's degree in computer science, software engineering, or mathematics. Programming code might also be a requirement for the job. It is important people working in technology stay up to date on recent developments in the field as progress happens quickly in this sector.

Neither of these two occupations are generally responsible for writing the programming code of the software, which is usually left to the programmers who may work in close contact with the software designers.

3. Market Research Analysts and Marketing Specialists/Data Miners

Once roles found almost exclusively within high-prestige and high-priced business strategy consulting firms, market research analyst positions have exploded throughout every sector of the economy with the rise of widespread data-gathering through transactional databases, consumer preference and loyalty programs, the Internet and social media, and customer relationship management systems. This unprecedented growth and use of consumer behavior data has created a high level of demand for those who can access, analyze, and extract meaningful, actionable, strategic, and tactical implications from an sea of data, both in business-to-consumer and business-to-business marketing.

Market research analysts and data miners hold the number three spot in this year's hot careers list. Some are employed directly by the companies that need to better understand and serve the needs of their clients and customers, while others remain housed within massive global consulting firms or niche-specialist boutique firms that draw upon deep knowledge of specific industries as diverse as nonprofits (such as museums and health care systems), big-box retail, information systems, and the automobile industry. Analysts typically leverage publicly available commercial databases, proprietary research and analysis instruments, and deep knowledge of their target industries to help organizations set and execute market strategies, track results, identify opportunities and threats, and further refine their approach to engaging with customers and clients.

Market research analysts and data miners generally analyze and forecast trends regarding competitors, pricing, distribution channels, and more to help create and drive marketing and outreach strategies that result in growth and profitability. Such research requires not only excellent quantitative skills, but also strong communication abilities that allow them to present critical information in succinct, unambiguous ways that support informed business decision-making. The ability to conceptualize complex numeric and strategic information -- and to present it clearly through charts, tables, graphs, flowcharts, trendlines and data-driven predictions -- are key skills for successful market research analysts.

Government data shows 392,740 currently employed marketing research analysts under classification code 13-1161. Although the mean annual salary, \$67,380, is considerably less than the number one and number two careers in the hot careers list, the job outlook between now and 2020 shows a deep and urgent need for more qualified individuals in these positions, with a projected growth rate of 41 percent by 2020.

Many different types of bachelor's degrees can provide entry-level paths to positions in market research analysis. Quantitative and logical fields such as math, statistics, or computer science provide a solid foundation for the analytic requirements of such positions. On the other hand, liberal arts degrees that emphasize human behavior and communication, such as sociology, psychology or economics, could also serve as a springboard to a market researcher position, especially if the candidate has experience in a particular business sector. Leadership and more technical jobs in this field often require a master's degree in fields such as statistics or marketing. The Market Research Association also offers a professional research certification for those looking to enter the field with demonstrated competency.

4. Accountants and Auditors

Accountants and auditors prepare and examine financial records for individuals, families, corporations, non-profits, and small businesses. They ensure that all financial transactions are accurately entered into an entity's books in a timely way, manage activities related to taxes and compliance with financial regulation, and monitor financial operations to ensure economic efficiency.

Under classification code 13-2011, the Bureau of Labor Statistics breaks down this occupation into four distinct categories:

- Public accountants, many of whom have earned the designation Certified Public Accountant (CPA) through extensive education and examinations, deal with a wide range of accounting and consulting work usually associated with legally required financial disclosure and liability forms. Public accountants may also conduct forensic accounting—the act of retroactively examining historical financial data and forms in the investigation of financial crimes.
- Management accountants, also called corporate or private accountants, usually perform internal financial assessments for their clients, including such operational activities as budgeting, financial performance evaluation, asset management, and investment oversight.
- Government accountants track and regulate the financial affairs of federal, state, and local governing bodies, ensuring that public revenues are collected and disbursed in accordance with legal requirements.
- Internal auditors focus on using financial records to identify accidental or intentional mismanagement of an entity's finances, and are particularly concerned with finding and eliminating instances of waste and fraud.

Accountants and auditors earned the number four spot on the hot careers list because of the sheer demand for accounting jobs. At last official count, 1,129,340 people in the U.S. were employed as accountants and auditors, with a respectable projected growth rate in the field of 16 percent by 2020.

The mean annual salary for accounting and audit careers is \$71,040, which has increased by nearly \$10,000 in the past three years alone (from \$61,690 in just 2010). Salary growth also illuminates why this is a promising career path for individuals with financial aptitude.

A bachelor's degree in accounting is the best way to gain an entry level position in this field. Other degrees in closely related fields may suffice, or people in lower-level financial occupations, such as bookkeepers or clerks, can work their way into junior accounting positions through a combination of additional education, internships, or on-the-job training. College graduates with strong math and economics skills are viable candidates for certificate programs in accounting.

There are many available licenses and certifications within the accounting field, including those from the Institute of Management Accountants, the Institute of Internal Auditors, and the American Institute of CPAs. Because accounting has a standard set of acceptable and standard practices, a career in the field also offers great potential for geographic mobility.

5. Network and Computer Systems Administrators

Network and computer systems administrators (classification code 15-1142) are the workers most people think of when they think of “IT,” or information technology. Administrators are responsible for planning and executing the installation, maintenance, troubleshooting, technical support, security, upgrades, user training and backup of enterprise, and consumer hardware and software systems.

Network administrators and systems administrators find work in nearly every sector of the economy. Large enterprises require a workforce dedicated to managing servers, access, computer systems integration, data storage, electronic communications, and transactions. For smaller organizations that may not have the need or resources for dedicated IT employees, administrators may be outsourced labor contracted through external IT firms.

The criteria that landed this occupation on the hot careers list are a mean annual salary of \$76,320 paired with a projected growth rate of 28 percent by 2020. Increased reliance on technology in homes and every economic sector will continue to generate strong demand for graduates who can fulfill the numerous needs of users and enterprises.

Currently, the U.S. government reports 350,320 systems administrators employed, but increasingly complex security threats, cybersurveillance, and upcoming “meaningful use” requirements of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010 will no doubt continue to require additional manpower on the front lines of computer networks and systems.

A bachelor’s degree in computer or information science is the strongest foundation for a career in systems administration or network administration, while those who have earned electrical or computer engineering degrees may also be competent in the role, depending on its specific requirements. IT employees, more than most, need ongoing education, training and development to keep up with evolving features, standards and upgrades in the systems they support.

6. Elementary School Teachers (excluding Special Education)

Elementary school teachers (classification code 25-2021) have chosen an occupation that is high on the hot careers list because of the number of currently employed teachers—1,360,380. Outnumbering any other single occupation nationally, a teaching career path tends to offer a form of stability that is relatively rare in other fields of pursuit. However, the mean annual salary is only \$56,130.

For those who have the patience, passion, and persistence to train for an occupation that receives less financial incentives than the other careers on the list, educating children in the elementary grades can prove a challenging, creative and rewarding career. Increasingly, teachers are required by statute to demonstrate the ability to help students achieve prescribed scores on national, state, and district standards, even as they introduce more intangible social concepts, such as adhering to social norms, obeying classroom rules, and following rules of etiquette. Teachers spend far more time on the job than the hours spent in the classroom. After class ends, they create lesson plans, grade assignments, evaluate individual and class academic performance, devise and implement strategies to improve student progress, and communicate effectively and collaboratively with parents to ensure their charges meet specified criteria in the building blocks of future study in mathematics, science, reading, writing, geography, and other subjects.

Employment opportunities for elementary teachers are regionally variable. Although in California the job market for entry-level teachers is not as robust as those in other geographic areas, overall demand for teachers is significant on a national level. From 2010–2020, a large number of teachers from the Baby Boom generation are also expected to retire, which will create additional positions for new teachers and results in projected national growth in the career of 18 percent by 2020.

All states require public elementary school teachers to have at least a bachelor's degree, as well as a teacher's license, certificate or credential; however, specific requirements vary by state. Teachers must also typically pass a background check, complete a teacher preparation program, and demonstrate classroom competence through supervised student teaching or a more lengthy and rigorous semester- or year-long teaching internship. Currently in eight states, an advanced degree (such as a master's or Ph.D.) has become a requirement to earn a full professional license, but this is far from a universal trend.

7. Computer Systems Analysts

The prevalence of tech-oriented careers in the hot careers list is no accident; adoption and use of technology since the 1980s has grown exponentially, and that trend shows no sign of slowing. Computer systems analysts (occupational code 15-1121) develop, install, inspect, and assess the integration and cross-platform functionality of computer systems of companies in every economic sector to ensure the business needs of the company are fully supported by software and hardware systems. They then determine how to maximize efficiency and return-on-investment by recommending and implementing enhancements to those systems, overseeing integration projects, conducting and interpreting user testing, and designing comprehensive user training and support platforms.

Computer systems analysts scored strongly in every category of hot careers evaluation. With 482,040 systems analysts currently employed in the U.S., the career category is projected to experience growth in demand of 22 percent by 2020. With a mean annual salary of \$83,800, it is among the most highly remunerative job categories on the list.

Employment opportunities in the field are especially diverse in terms of the economic sectors and types of employers who hire people for systems analyst roles, from in-house dedicated staff positions to outsourced consultant positions, either within a larger IT firm or as independent contractors. The career entry pathway is also relatively broad; systems analysts may hold almost any bachelor's degree. Although a degree in computer or information science may lower barriers to entry-level hiring, it is not specifically a minimum job requirement. Understanding of computer systems, project management, and some experience writing code are just as important to secure a position in this growing field.

8. Management Analysts

Management analysts (sometimes called management consultants-- classification code 13-1111) guide organizational executive leadership through the complicated process of enterprise performance improvement. Through observation, financial and process analysis, in-depth interviews with employees and suppliers and customers, they are tasked with identifying tangible opportunities for an organization to improve efficiency, profitability, market penetration, knowledge management, and innovation. Analysts typically distill their findings into high-level presentations on an organization's performance gaps and provide concrete recommendations to C-level decision-makers within the enterprise on, for example, ways to reduce waste, cut costs, improve quality, and compete effectively in sometimes crowded economic sectors.

While a bachelor's degree is a standard requirement for entry-level management analyst positions, a master's in business administration (MBA) or the Certified Management Consultant designation can improve prospects for career advancement and longevity.

There are a reported 540,440 employed nationwide at present. All industries—even government organizations and not-for-profit organizations—rely on the unique expertise of management analysts to operate efficiently. With the onset of the global economic recession that began in 2008, utilization of management consultants has been growing, and demand for these professionals is projected to continue to grow by 22 percent by 2020. The mean annual salary for management consultants is \$88,070.

While in previous decades management analysts were typically employed by large consultancies, more management consultants are choosing independent contractor status in recent years. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that 23 percent of those in the field now work for themselves. This offers a potential for greater flexibility in choosing clients and assignments within an analyst's area of expertise.

9. Public Relations Specialists

Public relations specialists (classification code 27-3031) are responsible for creating, maintaining, protecting, advocating, and shaping messages about individuals, brands, products, or entire enterprises to external audiences, including (but not limited to) media, customers, clients, and investors. They are by turns guardians of reputations, damage control experts, advocates, evangelists, and protectors who build and strengthen the bonds between their employer and the stakeholder audiences necessary to grow and thrive.

Most entry level public relations jobs are tactical in nature. They do not set the external communications strategy; instead, they produce press releases, publicity materials, website content, promotional campaigns, fundraising and media relations collateral materials to support the entity's strategy.

Compared to other jobs on the hot careers list, public relations specialists represent the smallest number of people currently employed (201,280), but the field has a projected growth rate of 23 percent by 2020.

The digital revolution has changed all careers, and this is especially true with public relations. Traditional media, such as newspapers, magazines, and network news, are in decline. So is the need for conventional publicists, who have historically relied upon these channels to distribute and relay messages. Today, public relations is a much broader endeavor, including more direct communications channels including websites, product sales and review sites, direct consumer review sites for services such as Yelp!, blogs, and even social media such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Communicating effectively through each of these unique platforms requires different sets of skills.

A bachelor's degree is generally required to enter public relations. Such majors as public relations, communications, English, journalism, or business are traditionally required for an entry level position. With the growing diversification and specialization of audiences, social science graduates may also find good prospects in the public relations field. Although advanced degrees are not a necessity for entry, many public relations specialists do eventually earn master's degrees in fields such as public relations or journalism to further develop and enhance their skills and their careers. Additional education helps with the transition from tactician to manager; In 2010, one-fourth of public relations managers held master's degrees. The mean annual salary in the field, counting both corporate and self-employed public relations specialists, is \$61,980.

10. Insurance Sales Agents

Insurance sales agents (classification code 41-3021) reach out to prospective clients to assess their risks and insurance needs, discuss insurance options with them, inform them about the full spectrum of insurance products available, assemble appropriate recommendations, and help them choose which policy or group of policies are best for them.

Insurance is an industry that serves both businesses and consumers alike. Products may take many forms: auto, life, health, property, casualty, liability, travel, worker's compensation, and errors and omissions are just a few. Insurance sales agents may opt to specialize in a specific type of policy, or they may offer comprehensive services to their clients, combining several different types of policies to offer the right balance of financial protection. Most direct consumers contact an insurance company with the intent of purchasing, but successful sales agents must also work on establishing a strong, loyal client base and developing referrals from existing clients for new ones.

Agents must sell policies for insurance companies or agencies, but the work environment varies. They may work within a major corporation (such as State Farm, Allstate, or GEICO), or they may practice out of a small business or independent practice. Agents who are brokers, offering the policies of more than one company, are classified as independent agents. By way of contrast, "captive agents" must by agreement sell the policies of only one company.

Insurance companies' profits are dependent upon a steady stream of new customers, so there is a constant need for sales agents to actively obtain customers. As the population lives longer, there will be an increased need for insurance agents; the Bureau of Labor Statistics expects this career path to increase by 22 percent by 2020.

Our research shows there are 336,740 insurance agents nationwide, earning a mean annual salary of \$63,400. Although one third of all insurance sales agents in 2010 reported having at least a bachelor's degree, only a high school diploma is required for entry to this job—a unique factor among the top ten hot careers. It is more important for an insurance sales agent to have basic business knowledge, people skills, and solid communication abilities.

The Job-Hunt Strategy

Although the job market is still recovering from the economic recession of 2008, the economy is steadily improving. According to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics released on July 5, 2013, the unemployment rate in the nation stands at 7.6 percent and has declined .3 percent since January, 2013.

Unemployment rates were at their highest point in 2010 and have been gradually decreasing since. Breaking out unemployment by the highest level of education achieved¹, rates for people with bachelor's degrees peaked at 5 percent in 2010. BLS data also showed that the value of a bachelor's degree should not be underestimated; those without a bachelor's degree saw an unemployment rate that peaked at 11 percent in 2010.

The job market is, nonetheless, slightly more difficult to crack for recent college graduates than the overall population with bachelor's degrees, because of their lack of experience in the workforce. The BLS's Monthly Labor Review for February 2013² reported that among college graduates under the age of thirty who graduated with a bachelor's in the past year, 11 percent were unemployed. A study from the University of Ohio, released January 2013, concluded that nearly half of college graduates are employed in jobs that do not require a bachelor's degree; these recent graduates are in essence taking any available job they can find.

UC San Diego Extension initiated the hot careers list to help new college graduates identify the most promising "bridgeability" careers, desirable positions which could be easily attained with minimal extra preparation. This reports notes up-to-date employment trends and projections.

The most noticeable difference between the 2012 and the 2013 list is the absence of healthcare positions this year and the increase in analytical and technical occupations.

According to the BLS's Employment Situation Summary of April 2013³, within the past year jobs categorized under "professional and business services" have grown the most, averaging an increase of nearly 49,000 jobs per month. This is reflected in the hot careers list by such jobs as computer systems analysts and software applications developers moving higher on the list.

Jobs such as physician assistants and physical therapists are still in demand—the healthcare sector averaged an increase of 24,000 jobs per month. But this growth is merely half of that in the business services sector today. The absence of these jobs from the hot jobs list is also due to the fact that healthcare jobs are requiring increasingly more specialization beyond a bachelor's degree. As registered nurses take the jobs that previously only called for an associate's degree, healthcare jobs are becoming more competitive.

The jobs featured on the hot careers list are suited for those with bachelor's degrees because a large number of them require the critical thinking and analytical skills developed in a good liberal arts education. A variety of bachelor's degrees are applicable to the jobs on the list; the important thing is to fill gaps if needed and present one's talents in a manner that meets the skill requirements of the job, not just a college degree. In an article from Career Builder⁴, the company recommends graduates customize their resume for each particular job for which they apply. The author notes that at least one in every ten resumes submitted should get a response from a potential employer. If not, perhaps the resume should be edited to grab the reader's attention or better showcase one's credentials.

Finding a job in this ever-changing market can be tough, but these ten job profiles show there are readily attainable options for recent college graduates by augmenting and highlighting one's skills and connections. It only takes one job opening and one employer to bridge that gap.

Research Team

Henry DeVries, MBA is an author, educator, and assistant dean for external affairs at UC San Diego Extension, the continuing education arm of the university. The co-author of five career books, including *Closing America's Job Gap* and *Self-Marketing Secrets*, he speaks to thousands of business people each year on how to advance their careers and attract clients. DeVries earned his bachelor's degree at UC San Diego, his MBA from San Diego State University, and completed specialized training at the Harvard Business School. He writes and speaks on how to market your company, cause or career.

Dr. Sundari Baru is a research economist at UC San Diego Extension. She is currently working on an NSF-funded project on the dynamics of regional innovation. She was previously the research director at the Center on Policy Initiatives, a think tank based in San Diego, where she co-authored several research reports on the San Diego economy. Dr. Baru holds an M.A. and Ph.D. in economics from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

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End notes

1. From "How Bad Is the Job Market for College Grads? Your Definitive Guide," by Jordan Weissmann, April 2013, The Atlantic Magazine. www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2013/04/how-bad-is-the-job-market-for-college-grads-your-definitive-guide/274580/. Accessed May 2013.
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