

10 Highly Profitable 2-Year Degree Jobs

By Michelle Goodman, PayScale.com

Think a bachelor's or master's degree is the only way to advance your career? Think again. There are many associate's degree careers that pay high salaries. In fact, going after the highest paying jobs with a 2-year degree is a great way to handle debt after college graduation and reduce job-search anxieties after college.

Whether you're looking for a fresh start in a new, more lucrative field or enrolling in college for the first time, a 2-year associate's degree from a community college is one of the quickest routes to bringing home more bacon each week. This is especially good news for those high school graduates who are wondering what to do after high school and before college.

"Associate's degrees are much cheaper, and the entry requirements are not as onerous as they are for getting into a bachelor's program," says Dr. Laurence Shatkin, author of more than a dozen books for job hunters, including *150 Best Recession-Proof Jobs*.

Not only that, associate's degrees are incredibly convenient. Besides being right in your neighborhood, many 2-year programs offer part-time, evening, weekend and online classes -- good news for those already holding down a job and caring for a family.

So what are the best jobs with 2-year degrees? Which 2-year degrees offer the most job opportunities and will earn you the most green after graduation? If you're interested in how to make money after college, read on.

1. Physical Therapist Assistant.

While every other job sector slashed their workforce in 2008, the health care field added nearly 400,000 jobs. Plus, a salary in this field would likely take care of your debt after graduation. According to Shatkin, job openings for physical therapist assistants are expected to grow by 33 percent in the next decade, especially as Baby Boomers age and "get a bit more creaky." Most physical therapist assistants either work in a hospital or a physical therapist's office. Average salary: \$46,111 a year.

2. Web Designer.

As long as there are companies, organizations and creative agencies with something to sell or promote, there will be a need for people to design, code and maintain their web sites. Even in the tough economic times, some would consider this is one of the best jobs you can get with an associate's degree. Though many web designers are self-employed, countless others work in staff positions. Average salary: \$48,785 a year.

3. Electrical or Electronic Engineering Technician.

The high demand for engineers in this field makes electrical engineering one of the top 2-year degree jobs. These technicians comprise a third of all engineering technician jobs. They often work in industrial or commercial plants and laboratories, taking calculations, running tests, modifying equipment and otherwise assisting the engineers on their team. Average salary: \$47,163 a year

4. Registered Nurse.

If it's a high-growth field you want, you can't beat registered nursing. It's one of the associate's degree careers that pay high salaries. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, RNs are the largest occupation in the health care field, with 2.5 million jobs out there, about 587,000 new jobs expected to open up by 2016 and 59 percent of RNs working in hospitals. Average salary: \$55,276 a year.

5. Computer Support Specialist.

Finding one of the good careers with a 2-year degree isn't hard if you're interested in fixing computers. Computer support specialists include the tech support and help desk workers who assist customers and users with problems they're having with their computer hardware and software. Often, computer support specialists can enjoy the luxury of working from home or working flexible hours. Average salary: \$46,111 a year.

6. Executive or Administrative Assistant.

In the business sector, there's no shortage of administrative jobs. It's one of the surest jobs you can get with an associate's degree. "You're talking a quarter of a million job openings every year," says Shatkin. And though you may start as the low man or woman on the

totem pole, once you're in the door you're in a prime position to prove your worth and climb the ranks. Average salary: \$37,669 a year.

7. [Dental Hygienist.](#)

While would-be dental hygienists must obtain a state license on top of their 2-year degree, it's well worth the investment. It is one of the highest paying jobs with a 2-year degree. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, more than half of the country's dental hygienists work part-time and many enjoy flexible work schedules. Even better, this is one of today's fastest growing occupations. Average salary: \$57,148 a year.

8. [Surveying or Mapping Technician.](#)

Although the construction industry took some big employment hits in 2008, if all the infrastructure work President Obama has promised comes through, there will be a huge need for surveying and mapping technicians. It will be among the top 2-year degree jobs. Such technicians do much of their work in the field (a boon for those who don't want to sit in an office all day), collecting data, taking calculations and assisting with computer-aided drafting. Average salary: \$42,104 a year.

9. [Veterinary Technician.](#)

The Bureau of Labor Statistics expects this field to grow significantly during the next decade. Vet technicians often work in a private veterinary practice (zoo and aquarium work is harder to come by), performing lab tests and clinical procedures. Vet techs must pass a state exam and the salaries aren't as high as the other jobs on this list, but for those who want to help animals, the trade-offs are well worth it. Average salary: \$33,363 a year.

10. [Camera Operator.](#)

While competition to break into TV broadcasting and film can be stiff, the continued rise of web content means more opportunities for camera operators. It's one of the best jobs that you can get with an associate's degree if you want to be in this field. Television and film work often involve long or unusual hours. For that reason, many camera operators gravitate toward commercial advertising or corporate videos. The more computer skills a camera operator has, the better their job prospects. Average salary: \$42,558 a year.

ASSOCIATE DEGREES – STATE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

	Percent Employed	Annual Average Wage	New and Replacement Openings Over Previous Year		
			2008 (Actual)	2011 (Projected)	2013 (Projected)
Accounting	77%	\$ 36,061.13	1002	852	832
Administrative Assistant	(90%)	(\$27, 037.00)*	1236	978	901
Air Conditioning and Refrigeration Technology	78%	\$ 37,852.53	284	220	202
Anesthesia Technology	75%	\$ 34,618.13	151	129	122
Animation	71%	\$ 31,896.80	120	87	81
Architectural Technology	83%	\$ 31,616.00	69	51	52
Automotive Technology	67%	\$ 25,615.20	617	547	518
Banking and Financial Services	100%	\$ 31,312.91	321	199	147
Biomedical Electronics Technology	100%	\$ 39,020.80	42	36	35
Business Management	80%	\$ 35,772.17	895	677	591
Cardiovascular Technology	63%	\$ 39,691.60	41	33	31
Chemical Technician	***	***	46	46	47
Civil Engineering Technology	71%	\$ 38,492.48	33	26	27
Clinical Laboratory Technician	89%	\$ 34,424.00	99	78	71
Computer Electronics Technology	***	***	66	58	57
Criminal Justice-Law Enforcement	79%	\$ 33,098.62	573	502	484
Culinary Arts	75%	\$ 22,046.40	114	79	67
Dental Hygiene	74%	\$ 55,740.80	264	235	223
Dietetic Technician	57%	\$ 34,190.00	33	27	26
Early Childhood Education	94%	\$ 27,448.08	1088	898	871
eCommerce/Web Administration	***	***	95	74	67
Electronic Engineering Technology	50%	\$ 38,133.33	66	86	97
Electronic Technology	86%	\$ 36,474.88	21	18	18
Environmental and Pollution Control Technology	**	**	26	22	21
Fashion/Retail Marketing	100%	\$ 23,520.64	95	76	76
Fire Protection Technician	82%	\$ 35,926.22	443	402	394
Funeral Service	88%	\$ 37,152.00	20	22	21
Graphic Design	80%	\$ 22,443.20	194	194	195
Hotel/Hospitality Management	(75%)	***	215	138	107
Human Service Associate	64%	\$ 26,647.57	335	268	261
Individualized Technical Studies	75%	\$ 47,264.53	N/A	N/A	N/A
Interior Design	80%	\$ 26,544.58	76	59	53
Interpreter Technician	100%	\$ 33,126.08	46	40	53
IT Computer Support Specialist	73%	\$ 28,793.14	484	401	379
IT Information Systems Security Specialist	(44%)	(\$ 51,476.00)*	95	74	67
IT Network Specialist	90%	\$ 33,930.00	297	266	256
IT Programmer/Analyst	67%	\$ 33,800.00	216	139	115
Landscape Horticulture	85%	\$ 27,563.90	112	73	60
Legal Administrative Professional	**	**	206	160	145
Liberal Arts and Sciences A.A./A.S. Degrees	69%	\$ 29,501.13	N/A	N/A	N/A
Logistics	100%	\$ 46,849.92	277	303	314
Management Development (Supervisory Mgmt.)	96%	\$ 41,367.42	1532	1126	931
Marketing Management	81%	\$ 41,161.47	158	124	112
Mechanical Design Technology	75%	\$ 36,878.40	95	117	138
Medical Administrative Specialist	86%	\$ 27,887.60	341	247	213
Music Occupations	60%	\$ 40,560.00	127	93	87
Occupational Therapy Assistant	100%	\$ 40,314.56	37	31	30
Paralegal	71%	\$ 31,585.75	139	125	119
Photography	100%	\$ 20,800.00	59	44	122
Physical Therapist Assistant	100%	\$ 38,642.93	70	60	57
Radiography	100%	\$ 43,090.67	215	165	147
Real Estate	(94%)	(\$40,000.00)*	1761	1081	943
Registered Nursing	91%	\$ 51,359.18	2694	2290	2194
Respiratory Therapist	95%	\$ 48,103.90	93	77	73
Surgical Technology	92%	\$ 32,795.36	151	129	122
Technical Studies-Apprentice	100%	\$ 67,704.00	N/A	N/A	N/A
Television and Video Production	82%	\$ 24,704.46	68	56	59
Visual Communication/Computer Graphics	83%	\$ 29,719.04	120	87	81
Welding Technology	100%	\$ 45,568.64	389	405	449
Program Average	83%				
Program Average Wage		\$ 35,582.30			

DIPLOMAS – STATE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

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			2008 (Actual)	2011 (Projected)	2013 (Projected)
Air Conditioning, Refrigeration and Heating	75%	\$ 37,095.31	284	220	202
Appliance Technician	75%	\$ 34,840.00	89	65	61
Architectural Woodworking/Cabinetmaking	80%	\$ 24,261.71	126	116	104
Auto Collision Repair and Finish Technician	60%	\$ 23,410.40	154	134	117
Automotive Maintenance Technician	67%	\$ 27,132.11	617	547	518
Aviation Technician	(100%)	***	4	3	1
Baking Production	90%	\$ 21,234.20	122	128	130
Barber/Cosmetologist	78%	\$ 19,517.96	167	137	199
Bilingual Office Assistant	75%	\$ 24,897.60	1944	1568	1438
Bricklaying and Masonry	***	***	299	240	196
Carpentry	84%	\$ 25,538.24	1619	1169	944
Computer Numerical Control					
Machine Operator/Programmer	**	**	15	20	24
Computerized Accounting Assistant	60%	\$ 34,320.00	1002	852	832
Customer Information Specialist****	**	**	1398	1145	1033
Dental Assistant	82%	\$ 29,978.00	332	292	275
Dental Technician	100%	\$ 21,424.00	10	24	32
Diesel and Powertrain Servicing	(50%)	***	228	194	185
Electrical Power Distribution	100%	\$ 40,541.80	102	113	119
Electricity	89%	\$ 26,237.71	762	675	636
Emergency Medical Technician - Basic	76%	\$ 29,762.28	229	173	167
Food Service	***	***	798	716	682
Health Unit Coordinator	92%	\$ 28,914.08	227	189	174
Machine Tool Operations	50%	\$ 28,553.20	110	154	180
Mechanical and Computer Drafting	***	***	95	117	138
Medical Assistant	75%	\$ 32,933.33	511	416	356
Medical Interpreter	(100%)	(\$ 32,000.00)*	46	40	53
Nursing Assistant	73%	\$ 25,083.52	1183	1012	955
Office Technology Assistant	(83%)	(\$ 29,118.00)*	1944	1568	1438
Optician Science	***	***	136	112	94
Pharmacy Technician	71%	\$ 25,865.96	434	419	411
Phlebotomy	76%	\$ 29,378.27	325	250	230
Power Engineering and Boiler Operator	(50%)	***	0	17	24
Practical Nursing	78%	\$ 37,728.33	543	462	431
Preparatory Plumbing	83%	\$ 25,059.84	518	431	404
Renal Dialysis Technician	100%	\$ 26,689.00	59	51	53
Small Business Training	75%	\$ 37,862.93	956	760	693
Tool and Die Making	(90%)	(\$ 34,193.00)*	24	101	139
Welding	69%	\$ 33,269.60	74	92	106
Program Average	78%				
Program Average Wage		\$ 28,904.98			
Total Graduate Survey Response Rate	59%				

() Data provided by WTCS 2008 Graduate Follow-Up Report

* Salary amounts from WTCS 2008 Graduate Follow-Up Report are median figures, not average

** Insufficient data for reporting, including averages

*** Comparable data unavailable from the state

NOTE:

**** New Program

Program Average Percent Employed figures do not include WTCS figures.

Program Average Wage figures do not include median wage figures.

Employment opportunities include all Wisconsin counties.



Highest Paying Jobs That Require a Two Year Degree

According to the Federal Government's Bureau of Labor Statistics, people who work in the careers below earn high wages working in fields that require only two years of college or training. The hourly wages listed are the median amounts earned in 2004.

Dental Hygienists	\$27.09
Funeral Directors	\$24.03
Registered Nurses	\$21.69
Engineering Technicians	\$20.89
Court Reporters	\$19.97
Radiological Technicians	\$19.66
Respiratory Therapists	\$18.69
Science Technicians	\$18.49
Heavy Equipment Mechanics	\$18.48
Automotive Body Repairers	\$18.44
Paralegals	\$17.56
Cardiovascular Technologists	\$17.51
Sales Worker Supervisors	\$16.59
Machinists	\$16.58
Surgical Technologists	\$15.00