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Oregon State diploma yields top salary

Premium content from Portland Business Journal by Robert Goldfield and Brad Broberg

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Want your children to get the best salary possible after graduating in Oregon?

Then send them to [Oregon State University](#) , which tops a list of 12 Oregon colleges with a median, mid-career salary of \$86,900 a year, according to surveys by salary research company PayScale Inc. of Seattle.

Second to OSU is the [University of Portland](#) , at \$85,900, according to figures released by PayScale in late July. A close third is [Pacific University](#) in Forest Grove and Hillsboro, at \$85,500.

Bringing up the rear is [George Fox University](#) in Newberg, at \$63,600.

When PayScale grouped the results for 137 schools in 13 western states, OSU ranked 31st. The University of Portland ranked 33rd and Pacific University 34th.

But wait. If you truly want to get the best bang for your buck, then another figure, return on investment, takes more factors into account. And by that measure, you'll want to send the kids to the [Oregon Institute of Technology](#) in Klamath Falls.

The typical 30-year return on investment for in-state graduates of OIT is \$967,100, PayScale said.

PayScale's ROI report was limited to 691 schools, including eight in Oregon.

OSU then ranks second, with a 30-year ROI of \$858,800 for in-state graduates.

OIT ranks in the top 15 percent for 30-year net ROI for graduates when compared to the nearly 700 four-year institutions nationwide that PayScale rated for ROI. OIT ranked 91 out of 691 schools.

However, PayScale added a cautionary note about OIT: Its rank falls dramatically when taking into account its graduation rate, which is only 41 percent — the second-lowest rate among the eight Oregon schools ranked by ROI.

When calculating the net 30-year ROI for graduates and non-graduates alike, University of Portland tops the Oregon list at \$539,200.

PayScale is an online provider of employee compensation data. The company collects the data on a voluntary basis from people visiting its website looking for pay stats for various jobs. All of those responses become part of a huge database that PayScale uses to prepare reports for employers that subscribe to its services.

Besides asking for work information such as salary, title and experience, PayScale asks website visitors what college they attended and what degree they earned.

Released in late July, the company's 2011 College Salary Report compares grads from 1,004 public and private schools (12 in Oregon). The analysis is based on responses from 1.4 million individuals — approximately 1,000 per school — and is limited to students with bachelor's degrees only.

Topping the list is Princeton University. The median mid-career salary of its graduates is \$130,000.

Separately, PayScale's ROI Report, compares 693 schools (eight in Oregon), with public school rankings based on both state resident and out-of-state tuition costs.

PayScale calculates ROI by comparing the expected earnings of a school's graduates with the expected earnings of someone going to work right out of high school. It considers the cost of attendance — tuition, fees, books, and room and board — as well as income lost from going to college rather than immediately entering the workforce.

The number of years it typically takes a student to take home a diploma and graduation rates, also factor in.

But *what* to study matters as much as *where* to study.

Engineering schools and engineering degrees dominate PayScale's salary rankings. Schools with a strong engineering and science focus account for 14 of the top 20 spots in the mid-career pay rankings. Geography is another strong influence. Schools from the Northeast account for 15 of the top 20 spots in the salary rankings. The highest ranked school in the West is Colorado School of Mines, at No. 21.

Jeff Strohl, research director at the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, believes PayScale's data has value, but he said the data must be taken with a grain of salt because it is based on a "highly selective group," that is people who visit the PayScale website and who will to fill out a survey.

While it's possible that the individuals in PayScale's database closely reflect the general population, too little is known about them to say for sure, said Strohl.

"What's lacking," he said, "is a reference point ... to check against."

Top five Oregon colleges for median, mid-career salaries

- 1. Oregon State, \$86,900**
- 2. University of Portland, \$85,900**
- 3. Pacific University, \$85,500**
- 4. Reed College, \$83,100**
- 5. OIT, \$81,000**

Top Five Oregon colleges in terms of starting salaries

- 1. OIT, \$53,600**
- 2. Pacific University, \$50,500**
- 3. University of Portland, \$47,700**
- 4. Linfield College, \$45,400**

5. Oregon State, \$44,600

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