

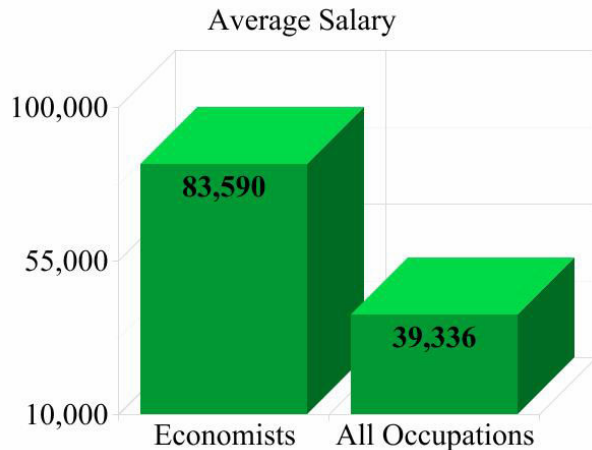
Economists

Career Profiles provided by StudentScholarships.org

WHAT THEY DO

Economists study how society distributes resources, such as land, labor, raw materials, and machinery, to produce goods and services. They conduct research, collect and analyze data, monitor economic trends, and develop forecasts on a wide variety of issues, including energy costs, inflation, interest rates, exchange rates, business cycles, taxes, and employment levels, among others.

Economists develop methods for obtaining the data they need. For example, sampling techniques may be used to conduct a survey, and various mathematical modeling techniques may be used to develop forecasts. Preparing reports, including tables and charts, on research results also is an important part of an economist's job, as is presenting economic and statistical concepts in a clear and meaningful way for those who do not have a background in economics. Some economists also perform economic analysis for the media.



Many economists specialize in a particular area of economics, although general knowledge of basic economic principles is essential. Microeconomists study the supply and demand decisions of individuals and firms, such as how profits can be maximized and the quantity of a good or service that consumers will demand at a certain price. Industrial economists and organizational economists study the market structure of particular industries in terms of the number of competitors within those industries and examine the market decisions of competitive firms and monopolies. These economists also may be concerned with antitrust policy and its impact on market structure.

Macroeconomists study historical trends in the whole economy and forecast future trends in areas such as unemployment, inflation, economic growth, productivity, and investment. Monetary economists and financial economists do work that is similar to that done by macroeconomists.

These workers study the money and banking system and the effects of changing interest rates. International economists study global financial markets, currencies and exchange rates, and the effects of various trade policies such as tariffs. Labor economists and demographic economists study the supply and demand for labor and the determination of wages. These economists also try to explain the reasons for unemployment and the effects of changing demographic trends, such as an aging population and increasing immigration, on labor markets. Public finance economists are involved primarily in studying the role of the government in the economy and the effects of tax cuts, budget deficits, and welfare policies. Econometricians investigate all areas of economics and apply mathematical techniques such as calculus, game theory, and regression analysis to their research.

EDUCATION REQUIRED

A master's or Ph.D. degree in economics is required for many private sector economist jobs and for advancement to higher-level positions. In the Federal Government, candidates for entry-level economist positions must have a bachelor's degree with a minimum of 21 semester hours of economics and 3 hours of statistics, accounting, or calculus, or a combination of education and experience.

Economics includes numerous specialties at the graduate level, such as econometrics, international economics, and labor economics. Students should select graduate schools that are strong in the specialties that interest them. Some schools help graduate students find internships or part-time employment in government agencies, economic consulting or research firms, or financial institutions before graduation.

Undergraduate economics majors can choose from a variety of courses, ranging from microeconomics, macroeconomics, and econometrics to more philosophical courses, such as the history of economic thought. Because of the importance of quantitative skills to economists, courses in mathematics, statistics, econometrics, sampling theory and survey design, and computer science are extremely helpful.

Whether working in government, industry, research organizations, or consulting firms, economists with a bachelor's degree usually qualify for entry-level positions as a research assistant, for marketing or finance positions, or for various sales jobs. A master's degree usually is required to qualify for more responsible research and administrative positions. A Ph.D. is necessary for top economist positions in many organizations.

Aspiring economists should gain experience gathering and analyzing data, conducting interviews or surveys, and writing reports on their findings while in college. This experience can prove invaluable later in obtaining a full-time position in the field because much of the economist's work, especially in the beginning, may center on these duties. With experience, economists eventually are assigned their own research projects. Related job experience, such as work as a stock or bond trader, might be advantageous.

Economists - Continued

Career Profiles provided by StudentScholarships.org

OTHER USEFUL SKILLS

Those considering careers as economists should be able to pay attention to details because much time is spent on precise data analysis. Candidates also should have strong computer and quantitative skills and be able to perform complex research. Patience and persistence are necessary qualities, given that economists must spend long hours on independent study and problem solving. Good communication skills also are useful, as economists must be able to present their findings, both orally and in writing, in a clear, concise manner.

HOW TO ADVANCE

With experience or an advanced degree, economists may advance to positions of greater responsibility, including administration and independent research.

Many people with an economics background become teachers. A master's degree usually is the minimum requirement for a job as an instructor in a community college. In most colleges and universities, however, a Ph.D. is necessary for appointment as an instructor. A Ph.D. and publications in academic journals are required for a professorship, tenure, and promotion.

WORK ENVIRONMENT

Economists have structured work schedules. They often work alone, writing reports, preparing statistical charts, and using computers, but they also may be an integral part of a research team. Many work under pressure of deadlines and tight schedules, which may require overtime. Their routine may be interrupted by special requests for data and by the need to attend meetings or conferences. Some travel may be necessary.

FACING COMPETITION

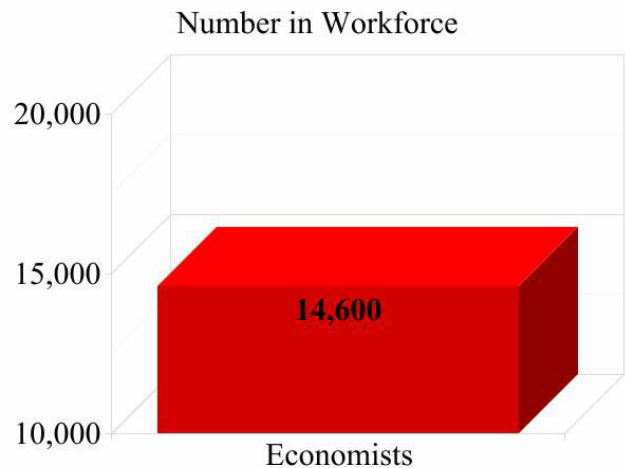
Bachelor's degree holders will face competition for the limited number of economist positions for which they qualify. However, they will qualify for a number of other positions that can use their broad-based economic knowledge. Many graduates with bachelor's degrees will find jobs in business, finance, insurance, or related fields. Numerous positions in sales should also be available. Bachelor's degree holders with good quantitative skills and a strong background in mathematics, statistics, survey design, and computer science also may be hired as researchers. Some will find jobs in government.

Candidates who meet State certification requirements may become high school economics teachers. The demand for secondary school economics teachers is expected to grow, as economics becomes an increasingly important and popular course.

JOB GROWTH

Employment of economists is expected to grow 6 percent from 2008 to 2018, which is slower than the average for all occupations. Demand for economic analysis should grow, but the increase in the number of economist jobs will be tempered as firms hire workers for niche areas with specialized titles. Many workers with economic backgrounds will work in related fields with more specific job titles, such as financial analyst, market analyst, public policy consultant, researcher or research assistant, purchasing manager, or a variety of positions in business and the insurance industry. Overall employment growth also will be slowed because of the relatively high number of economists—about 53 percent—employed in declining government sectors.

Employment growth should be fastest in private industry, especially in management, scientific, and technical consulting services. Rising demand for economic analysis in virtually every industry should stem from the growing complexity of the global economy, the effects of competition on businesses, and increased reliance on quantitative methods for analyzing and forecasting business, sales, and other economic trends. Some corporations choose to hire economic consultants to fill these needs, rather than keeping an economist on staff. This practice should result in more economists being employed in consulting services.



In addition to job openings from growth, the need to replace experienced workers who retire or leave the labor force for other reasons will create openings for economists.

Individuals with a background in economics should have opportunities in various occupations. Some examples of job titles often held by those with an economics background are financial analyst, market analyst, public policy consultant, researcher or research assistant, and purchasing manager.