High-paying occupations

Associate degree recipients tend to have higher earnings than other workers who do not have a bachelor’s degree.

Selected median annual wage - 2010

Aerospace engineering and operation technicians $58,080
Diagnostic medical sonographers $64,380
Registered nurses $64,690
Nuclear technicians $68,090
Dental hygienists $68,250
Nuclear medicine technologist $68,560
Radiation therapists $74,980
Construction managers $83,860
General and operation managers $94,400
Air traffic controllers $108,040


Associate degrees provide competitive labor market opportunities for high-paying and high-demand jobs. The 2010 median annual wage for all occupations was $33,840. The chart above shows the top 10 occupations that typically require an associate degree and are projected to have the most job openings between 2010 and 2020. Air traffic controllers, for example, earn on average $108,040; the field expects 10,200 job openings by 2020. General and operations managers earned $94,400, with 410,100 projected job openings. Construction managers earned $83,860, with a 120,400 job openings between 2010 and 2020. Most of the top 10 occupations are in health care, which is expected to be one of the fast-growing industries in the next decade. Projections call for 1.2 million openings for registered nurses and 104,900 for dental hygienists.

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