

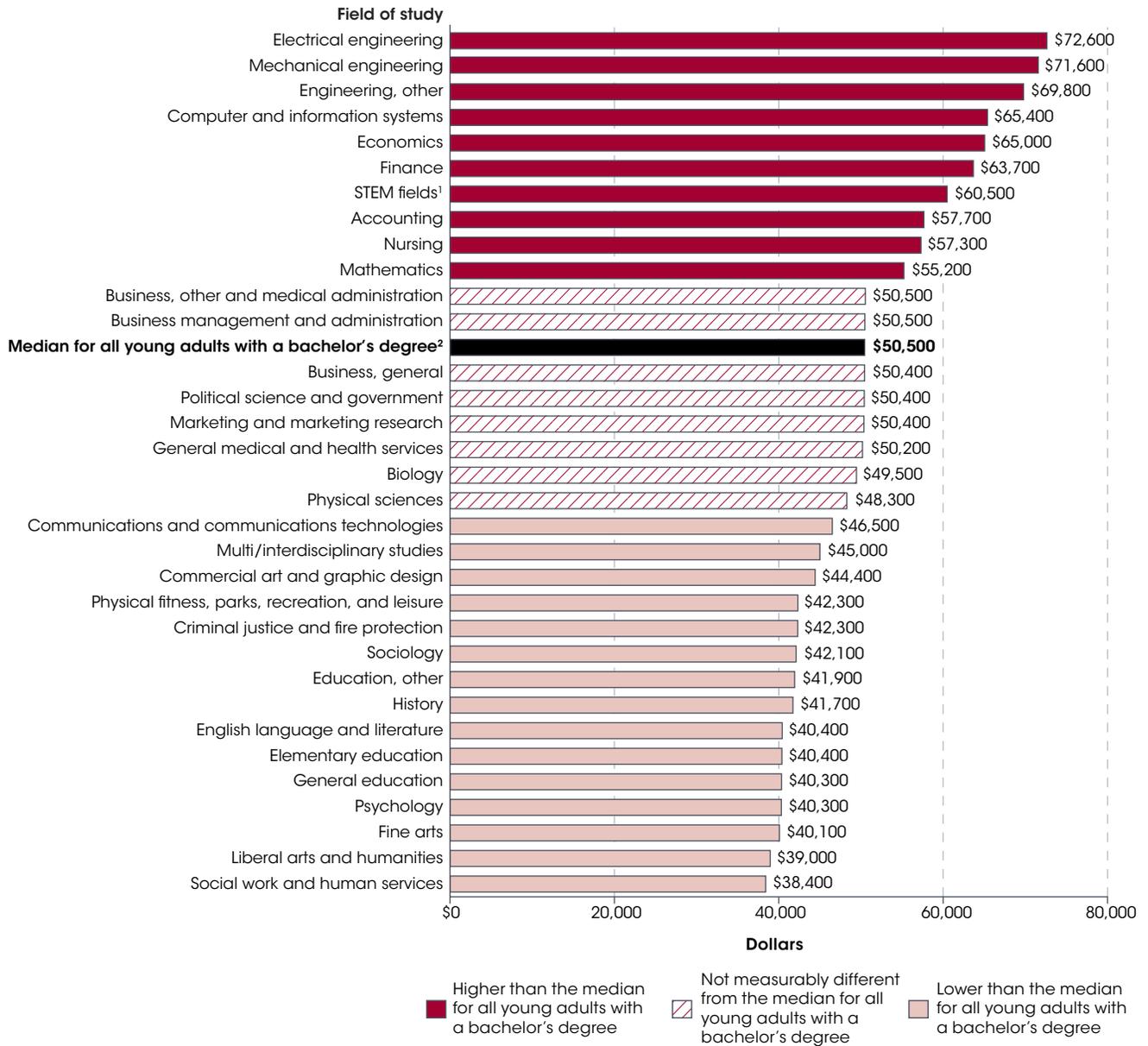
## Employment Outcomes of Bachelor's Degree Holders

*The average unemployment rate for young adult bachelor's degree holders ages 25–29 was lower in 2017 than in 2010 (3.1 vs. 5.6 percent). However, the median annual earnings for these young adults, in constant 2017 dollars, were not measurably different between these two years.*

In 2017, some 34 percent of 25- to 29-year-olds (referred to as “young adults” in this indicator) held a bachelor's degree. This indicator examines the median annual earnings and unemployment rate<sup>1</sup> of these bachelor's degree holders by undergraduate field of study,<sup>2</sup> both for individual fields separately and for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields combined.<sup>3</sup> Across all fields in 2017, the median annual earnings

of young adult bachelor's degree holders who were full-time year-round workers were \$50,500,<sup>4</sup> and the average unemployment rate was 3.1 percent. For the fields of study in which 1 percent or more of bachelor's degree holders had earned degrees,<sup>5</sup> median annual earnings ranged from \$38,400 to \$72,600, and unemployment rates ranged from 1.0 to 5.8 percent.<sup>6</sup>

Figure 1. Median annual earnings of 25- to 29-year-old bachelor's degree holders, by selected fields of study: 2017



<sup>1</sup> "STEM fields" include biological and biomedical sciences, computer and information sciences, engineering and engineering technologies, mathematics and statistics, and physical sciences and science technologies.

<sup>2</sup> Includes fields not separately shown.

NOTE: Only fields in which 1 percent or more of 25- to 29-year-old bachelor's degree holders had earned degrees are displayed. Median earnings are for full-time year-round employees (those who worked 35 or more hours per week and 50 to 52 weeks in the year). Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.

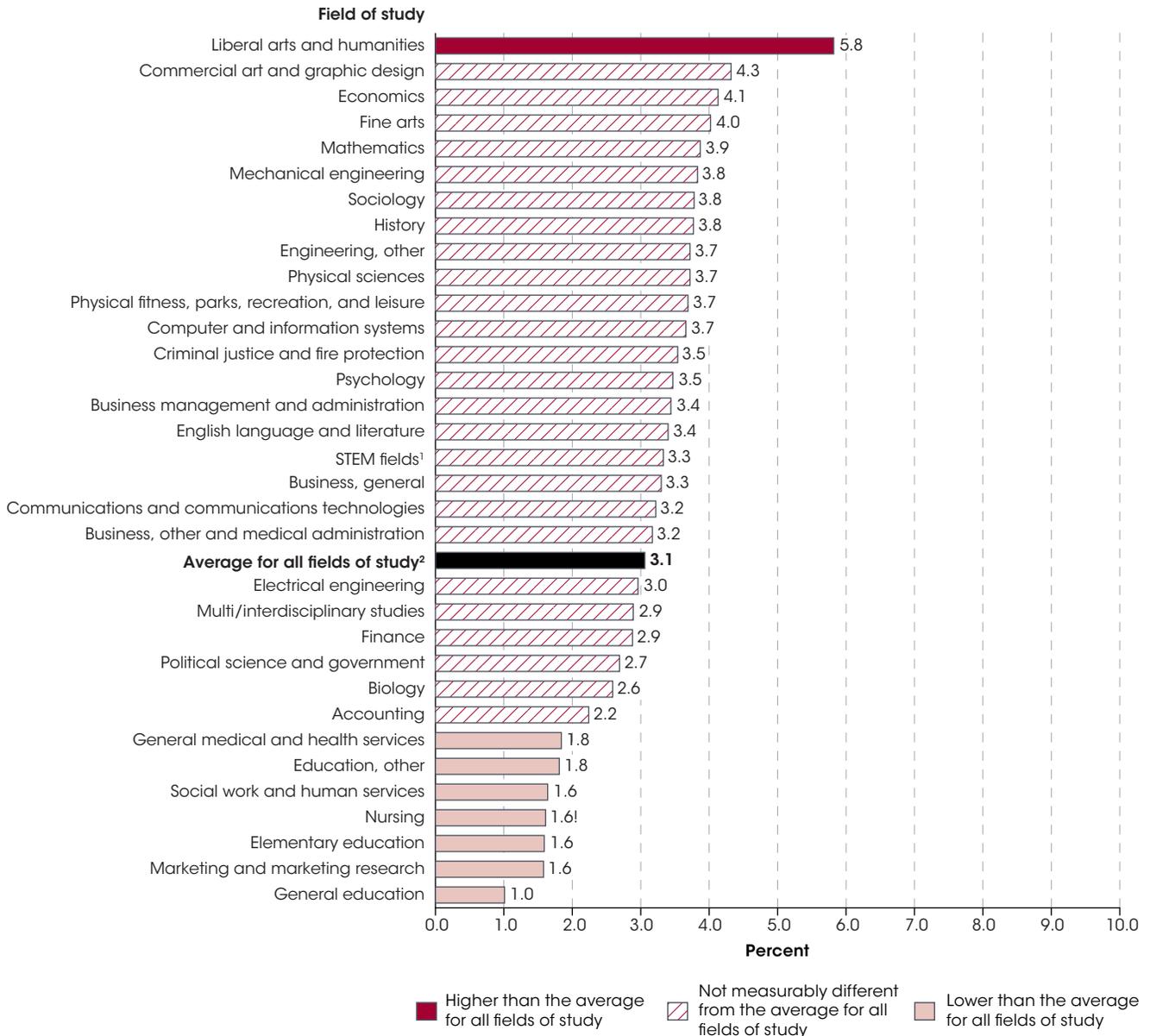
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, 2017 American Community Survey (ACS) Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) data. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, table 505.10.

Median annual earnings in 2017 for young adults who were full-time year-round workers varied by field of study. For example, young adults with bachelor's degrees in mechanical engineering (\$71,600) and electrical engineering (\$72,600) had some of the highest median annual earnings. In contrast, young adults with bachelor's degrees in social work and human services (\$38,400), liberal arts and humanities (\$39,000), and fine arts (\$40,100) had some of the lowest median annual earnings.

Bachelor's degree holders in the largest fields of study, those fields with at least 300,000 degree holders,<sup>7</sup> also varied in their median annual earnings in 2017. For example, among the largest fields, young adults with bachelor's degrees in fine arts (\$40,100), psychology (\$40,300), and communications and communications

technologies (\$46,500) had lower median annual earnings than the median annual earnings for all young adults with a bachelor's degree (\$50,500). Young adults with bachelor's degrees in biology, business management and administration, and general medical and health services had median annual earnings that were not measurably different from the median annual earnings for all young adults with a bachelor's degree. In contrast, those with bachelor's degrees in nursing (\$57,300) and computer and information systems (\$65,400) had higher median annual earnings than the median annual earnings for all young adults with a bachelor's degree. Young adults with bachelor's degrees in STEM fields (\$60,500) also had higher median annual earnings than the median annual earnings for all young adults with a bachelor's degree.

Figure 2. Unemployment rates of 25- to 29-year-old bachelor's degree holders, by selected fields of study: 2017



<sup>1</sup> Interpret data with caution. The coefficient of variation (CV) for this estimate is between 30 and 50 percent.

<sup>1</sup> "STEM fields" include biological and biomedical sciences, computer and information sciences, engineering and engineering technologies, mathematics and statistics, and physical sciences and science technologies.

<sup>2</sup> Includes fields not separately shown.

NOTE: Only fields in which 1 percent or more of 25- to 29-year-old bachelor's degree holders had earned degrees are displayed. The unemployment rate is the percentage of persons in the civilian labor force who are not working and who made specific efforts to find employment sometime during the prior 4 weeks. The civilian labor force consists of all civilians who are employed or seeking employment. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.

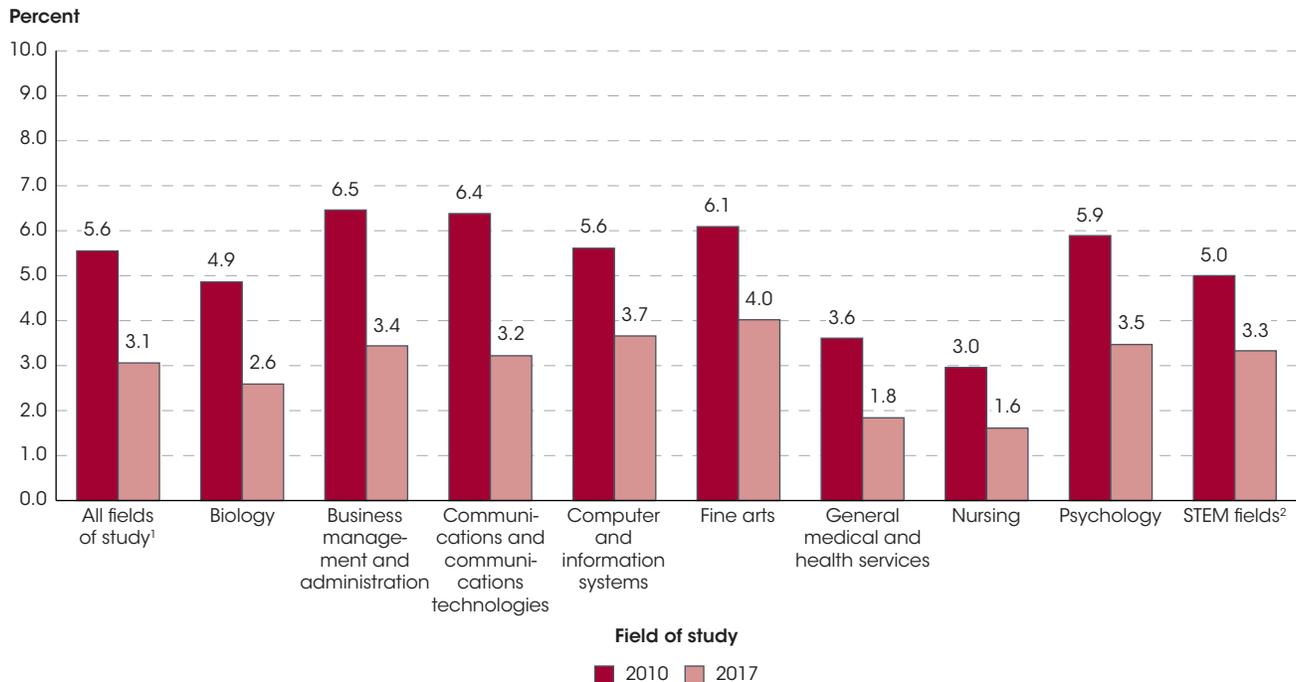
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, 2017 American Community Survey (ACS) Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) data. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, table 505.10.

The 2017 unemployment rate for bachelor's degree holders ages 25–29 also varied by field of study. For example, the unemployment rates for young adults with bachelor's degrees in the following fields of study were lower than the average unemployment rate for all fields of study (3.1 percent): general education (1.0 percent); marketing and marketing research (1.6 percent); elementary education (1.6 percent); nursing (1.6 percent); social work and human services (1.6 percent); education, other (1.8 percent); and general medical and health services (1.8 percent). In contrast, the unemployment rate for young adults with bachelor's degrees in liberal arts and humanities (5.8 percent) was higher than the average unemployment rate. The unemployment rates for young adults with bachelor's degrees in most other fields—including some of the largest fields of study, such as biology, business management and administration, communications and communications technologies, computer and information systems, fine arts, and psychology—were not measurably different from the average unemployment rate for all fields of study. The unemployment rate for young adults with a

bachelor's degree in STEM fields (3.3 percent) was also not measurably different from the average for all fields of study.

In 2017, among the fields of study in which 1 percent or more of young adult bachelor's degree holders had earned degrees, young adults with bachelor's degrees in nursing had above-median annual earnings when compared with the earnings for all young adults with a bachelor's degree and a below-average unemployment rate. Nursing graduates had median annual earnings of \$57,300 and an unemployment rate of 1.6 percent. Liberal arts and humanities was the only field for which young adult bachelor's degree holders had both below-median earnings and an above-average unemployment rate. Liberal arts and humanities graduates had median annual earnings of \$39,000 and an unemployment rate of 5.8 percent. In 2017, young adults with bachelor's degrees in the following fields of study had below-median earnings, but had below-average unemployment rates: education, other; elementary education; general education; and social work and human services.

**Figure 3. Unemployment rates of 25- to 29-year-old bachelor's degree holders, by selected fields of study: 2010 and 2017**



<sup>1</sup> Includes fields not separately shown.

<sup>2</sup> "STEM fields" include biological and biomedical sciences, computer and information sciences, engineering and engineering technologies, mathematics and statistics, and physical sciences and science technologies.

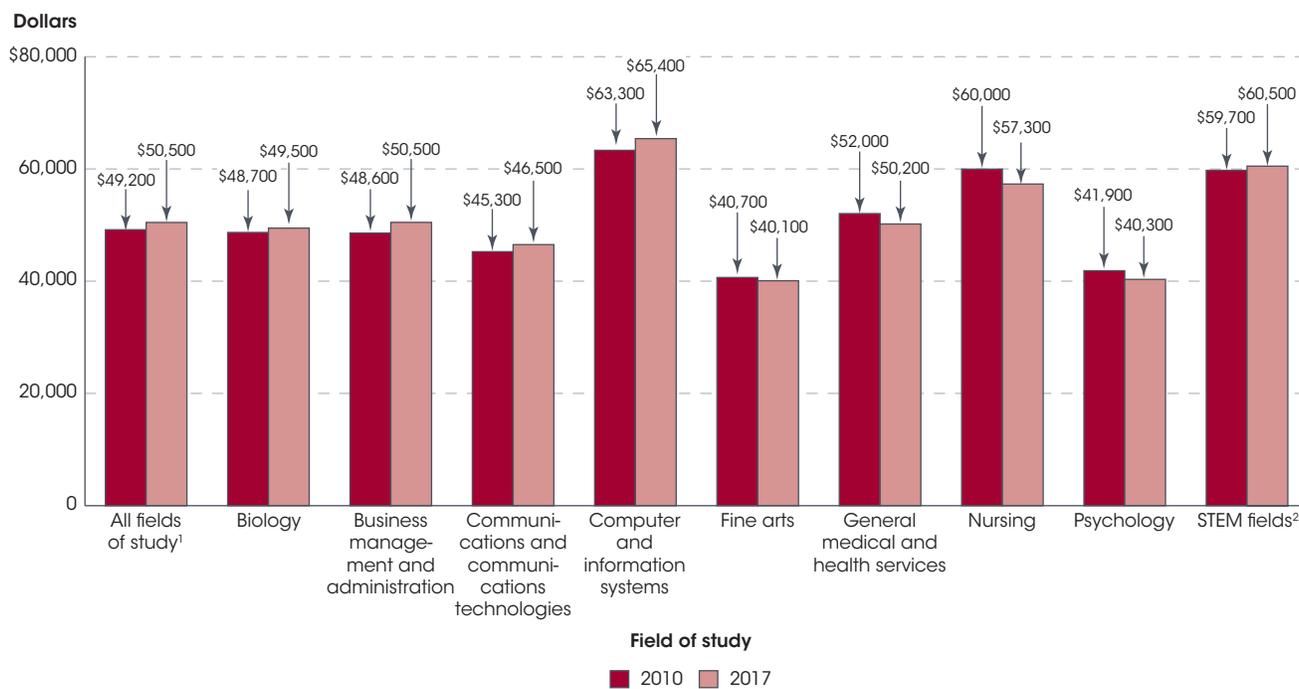
NOTE: Includes fields with at least 300,000 degree holders and for which the average unemployment rate for young adult bachelor's degree holders was lower in 2017 than in 2010. The unemployment rate is the percentage of persons in the civilian labor force who are not working and who made specific efforts to find employment sometime during the prior 4 weeks. The civilian labor force consists of all civilians who are employed or seeking employment. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, 2010 and 2017 American Community Survey (ACS) Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) data. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, table 505.10.

The average unemployment rate for young adult bachelor's degree holders was lower in 2017 than in 2010 overall (3.1 vs. 5.6 percent) and within some fields of study. For example, unemployment rates were lower in 2017 than in 2010 for young adults with bachelor's degrees in the eight largest fields of study: biology (2.6 vs. 4.9 percent), business management and administration (3.4 vs. 6.5 percent), communications and communications technologies (3.2 vs. 6.4 percent), computer and

information systems (3.7 vs. 5.6 percent), fine arts (4.0 vs. 6.1 percent), general medical and health services (1.8 vs. 3.6 percent), nursing (1.6 vs. 3.0 percent), and psychology (3.5 vs. 5.9 percent). There was no field of study where the unemployment rate for young adult bachelor's degree holders was higher in 2017 than in 2010. Additionally, the unemployment rate was lower in 2017 than in 2010 for young adult bachelor's degree holders in STEM fields (3.3 vs. 5.0 percent).

**Figure 4. Median annual earnings of 25- to 29-year-old bachelor's degree holders, by selected fields of study: 2010 and 2017**



<sup>1</sup> Includes fields not separately shown.

<sup>2</sup> "STEM fields" include biological and biomedical sciences, computer and information sciences, engineering and engineering technologies, mathematics and statistics, and physical sciences and science technologies.

NOTE: Includes fields with at least 300,000 degree holders and for which the average unemployment rate for young adult bachelor's degree holders was lower in 2017 than in 2010. Median earnings are for full-time year-round employees (those who worked 35 or more hours per week and 50 to 52 weeks in the year). Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, 2010 and 2017 American Community Survey (ACS) Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) data. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, table 505.10.

While the average unemployment rate for young adult bachelor's degree holders was lower in 2017 than in 2010, their median annual earnings in 2017 (\$50,500) were not measurably different from those in 2010 (in constant 2017 dollars). Among the largest fields of study, median annual earnings were also not measurably different between these two years for biology, business management and

administration, communications and communications technologies, computer and information systems, fine arts, general medical and health services, and nursing. The same pattern held true for young adult bachelor's degree holders in STEM fields. However, median annual earnings for young adults with bachelor's degrees in psychology were lower in 2017 than in 2010 (\$40,300 vs. \$41,900).

**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> The unemployment rate is the percentage of persons in the civilian labor force who are not working and who made specific efforts to find employment sometime during the prior 4 weeks. The civilian labor force consists of all civilians who are employed or seeking employment.

<sup>2</sup> The first bachelor's degree major reported by respondents was used to classify their field of study, even though they were able to report a second bachelor's degree major and may possess advanced degrees in other fields.

<sup>3</sup> STEM fields include biological and biomedical sciences, computer and information sciences, engineering and engineering technologies, mathematics and statistics, and physical sciences and science technologies.

<sup>4</sup> All median annual earnings are reported in constant 2017 dollars, based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI), and represent the median annual earnings of full-time, year-round workers.

<sup>5</sup> One percent is roughly equivalent to 78,900 bachelor's degree holders.

<sup>6</sup> In this indicator, comparisons by field of study are limited to fields of study in which 1 percent or more of 25- to 29-year-old bachelor's degree holders had earned degrees, unless otherwise noted. Totals include all fields of study, including those in which less than 1 percent of bachelor's degree holders had earned degrees.

<sup>7</sup> In 2017, there were at least 300,000 degree holders in STEM fields, as well as in each of the following fields: biology, business management and administration, communications and communications technologies, computer and information systems, fine arts, general medical and health services, nursing, and psychology.

**Reference tables:** *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, table 505.10

**Related indicators and resources:** [Annual Earnings of Young Adults](#); [Employment and Unemployment Rates by Educational Attainment](#); [Undergraduate Degree Fields](#)

**Glossary:** Bachelor's degree; Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP); Constant dollars, Consumer Price Index (CPI); Employment status; Median earnings; STEM fields