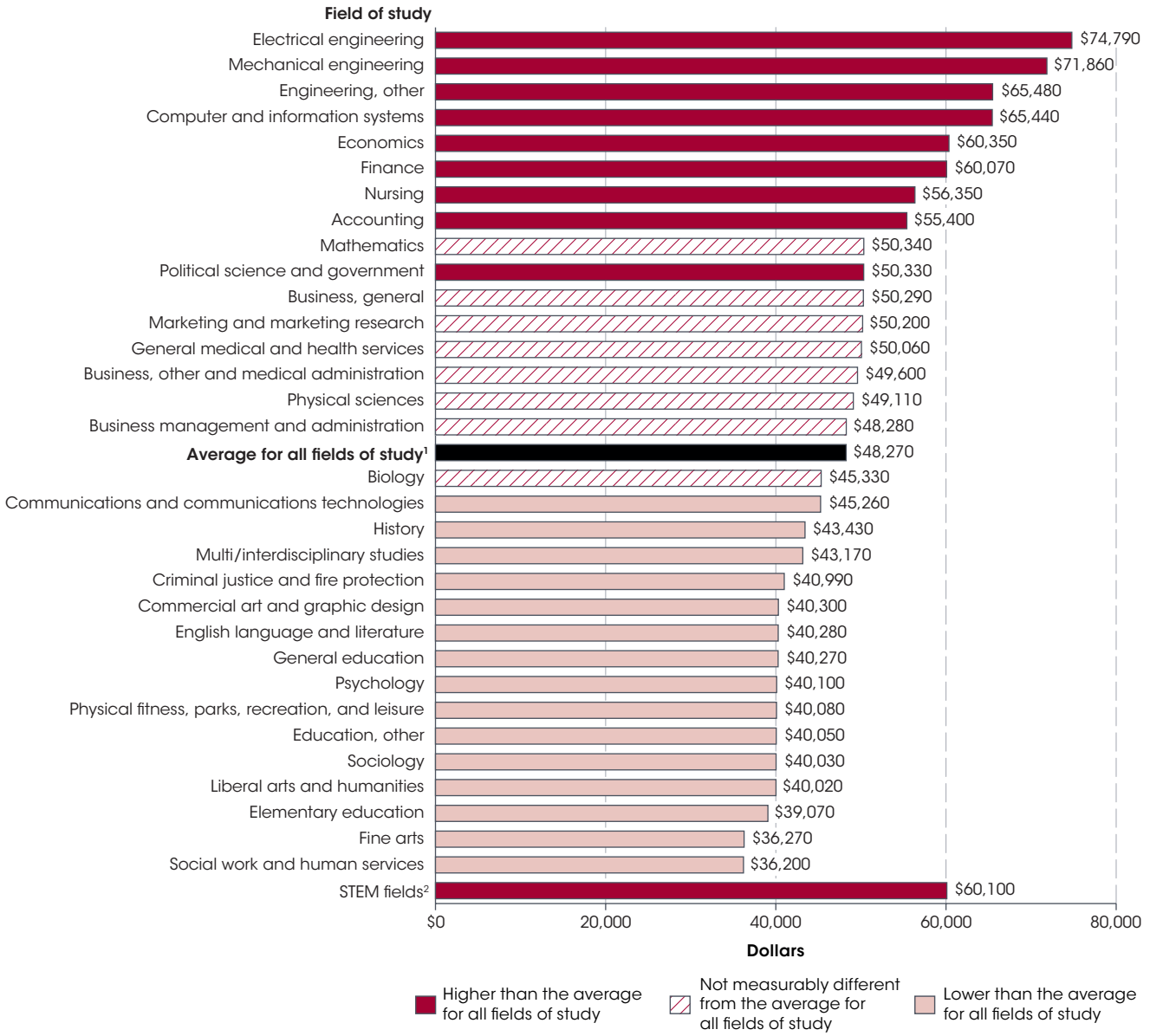
Employment Outcomes of Bachelor's Degree Recipients

The average unemployment rate for young adult bachelor's degree recipients ages 25–29 was lower in 2016 than in 2010 (3.1 vs. 5.6 percent). However, the median annual earnings for these young adults, in constant 2016 dollars, were not measurably different between 2016 and 2010.

In 2016, some 34 percent of 25- to 29-year-olds (defined as "young adults" in this indicator) held bachelor's degrees. This indicator examines the median annual earnings and unemployment rate[1] of these bachelor's degree recipients by undergraduate field of study,[2] both for individual fields and for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields combined.[3] Across all fields in 2016, the median annual earnings of young adult bachelor's degree recipients who were full-time year-round workers were $48,270,[4] and the average unemployment rate was 3.1 percent. For the fields of study in which 1 percent or more of bachelor's degree recipients had earned degrees,[5] median annual earnings ranged from $36,200 to $74,790, and unemployment rates ranged from 1.1 to 5.6 percent.

Figure 1. Median annual earnings of 25- to 29-year-old bachelor's degree recipients, by selected fields of study: 2016

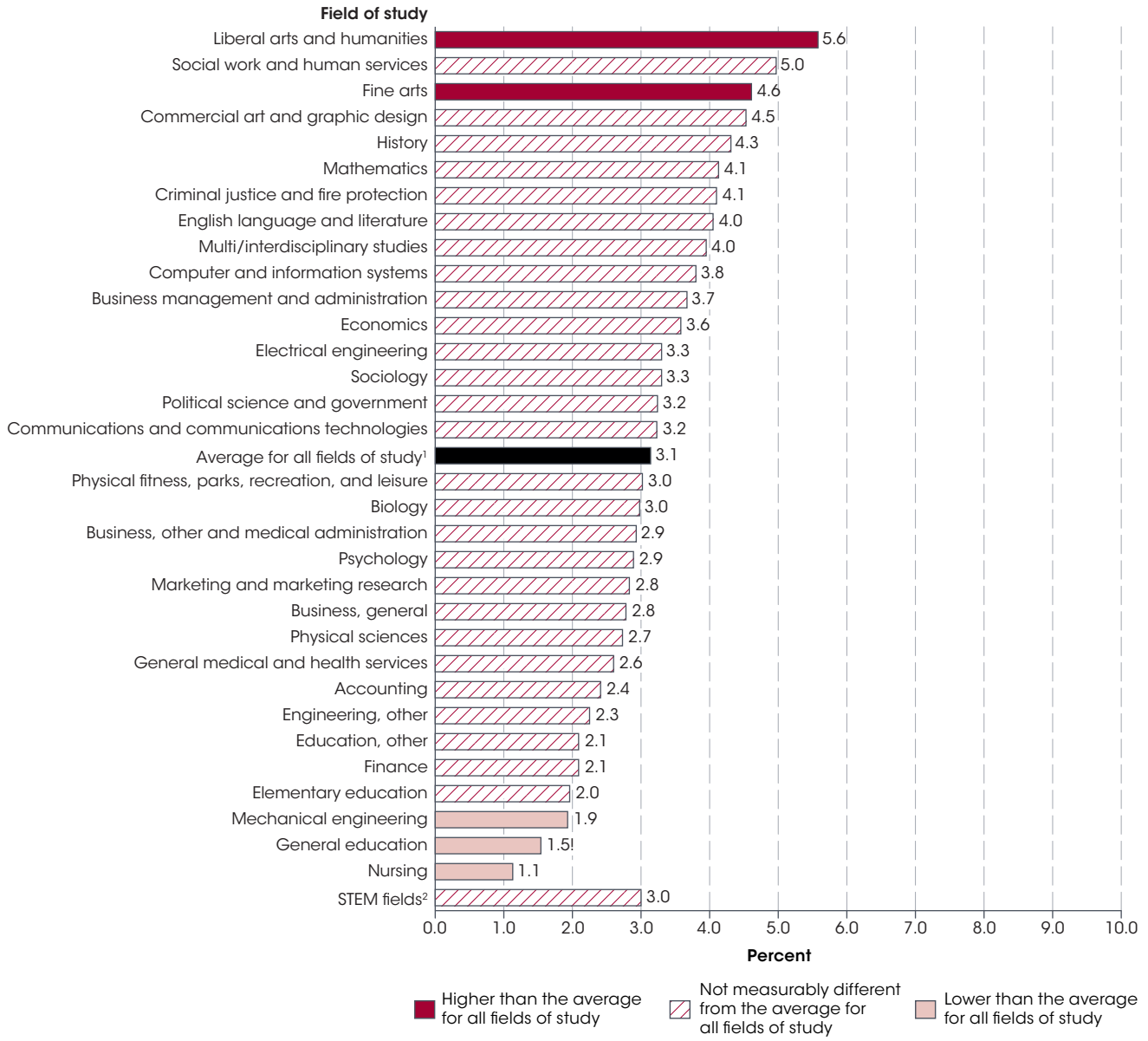


[1] Includes fields not separately shown.
[2] "STEM fields" include biological and biomedical sciences, computer and information sciences, engineering and engineering technologies, mathematics and statistics, and physical sciences and science technologies.
NOTE: Only fields in which 1 percent or more of 25- to 29-year-old bachelor's degree recipients 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).
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, 2016 American Community Survey (ACS) Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) data. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, table 505.10.

Median annual earnings in 2016 for young adults who were full-time year-round workers varied depending on the field of study. For example, young adults with bachelor's degrees in electrical engineering ($74,790) and mechanical engineering ($71,860) had some of the highest median annual earnings. In comparison, young adults with bachelor's degrees in social work and human services ($36,200), fine arts ($36,270), and elementary education ($39,070) had some of the lowest median annual earnings.

Bachelor's degree recipients in the largest fields of study, defined as fields with at least 300,000 degree recipients,[6] also varied in their median annual earnings. For example, among the largest fields, young adults with bachelor's degrees in fine arts ($36,270), psychology ($40,100), and communications and communications technologies ($45,260) had median annual earnings lower than the average median annual earnings for all fields of study ($48,270). 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 average. In comparison, those with bachelor's degrees in nursing ($56,350) had median annual earnings higher than the average for all fields of study. Young adults with bachelor's degrees in STEM fields ($60,100) also had

Figure 2. Unemployment rates of 25- to 29-year-old bachelor's degree recipients, by selected fields of study: 2016



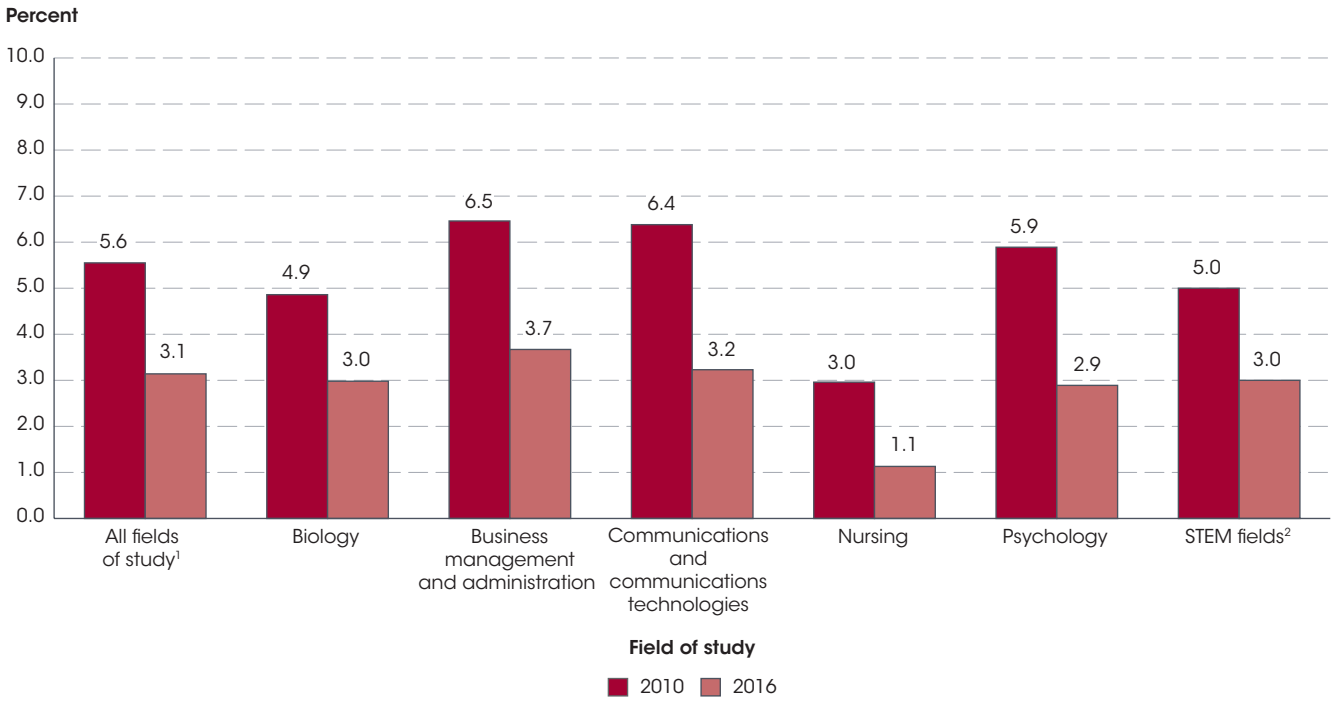
! Interpret data with caution. The coefficient of variation (CV) for this estimate is between 30 and 50 percent.
[1] Includes fields not separately shown.
[2] "STEM fields" include biological and biomedical sciences, computer and information sciences, engineering and engineering technologies, mathematics and statistics, and physical sciences and science technologies.
NOTE: Only fields in which 1 percent or more of 25- to 29-year-old bachelor's degree recipients 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.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, 2016 American Community Survey (ACS) Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) data. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, table 505.10.

median annual earnings higher than the average median annual earnings for all fields of study.

The 2016 unemployment rate for young adults ages 25–29 also varied by field of study. For example, the unemployment rates for young adults with bachelor's degrees in nursing (1.1 percent), general education (1.5 percent), and mechanical engineering (1.9 percent) were lower than the average unemployment rate for all fields of study (3.1 percent). In comparison, the unemployment rates for young adults with bachelor's degrees in fine arts (4.6 percent) and liberal arts and humanities (5.6 percent) were higher than the average unemployment rate (3.1 percent). 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, general medical and health services, 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 (3.0 percent) was also not measurably different from the average for all fields of study.

In 2016, among the fields of study in which 1 percent or more of bachelor's degree recipients had earned degrees, young adults with bachelor's degrees in nursing and mechanical engineering had above-average median annual earnings and below-average unemployment rates. Nursing graduates had median annual earnings of $56,350 and an unemployment rate of 1.1 percent; and mechanical engineering graduates had median annual earnings of $71,860 and an unemployment rate of 1.9 percent. Fine arts and liberal arts and humanities were the two fields for which young adult bachelor's degree recipients had both below-average earnings and above-average unemployment rates. Fine arts graduates had median annual earnings of $36,270 and an unemployment rate of 4.6 percent; and liberal arts and humanities graduates had median annual earnings of $40,020 and an unemployment rate of 5.6 percent. In 2016, general education was the only field for which young adult bachelor's degree recipients had below-average earnings ($40,270) but a lower-than-average unemployment rate (1.5 percent).

Figure 3. Unemployment rates of 25- to 29-year-old bachelor's degree recipients, by selected fields of study: 2010 and 2016



[1] Includes fields not separately shown.
[2] "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 recipients and for which average unemployment rate for young adult bachelor's degree recipients was lower in 2016 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.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, 2010 and 2016 American Community Survey (ACS) Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) data. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, table 505.10.

The average unemployment rate for young adult bachelor's degree recipients was lower in 2016 than in 2010 overall (3.1 vs. 5.6 percent) and within some fields of study. For example, among the largest fields of study, unemployment rates were lower in 2016 than in 2010 for young adults with bachelor's degrees in biology (3.0 vs. 4.9 percent), business management and administration (3.7 vs. 6.5 percent), communications and communications technologies (3.2 vs. 6.4 percent), nursing (1.1 vs. 3.0 percent), and psychology (2.9 vs. 5.9 percent). There was no field of study where the unemployment rate for young adult bachelor's degree recipients was higher in 2016 than in 2010. The unemployment rate was also lower in 2016 than in 2010 for young adult bachelor's degree recipients in STEM fields (3.0 vs. 5.0 percent).

While the average unemployment rate for young adult bachelor's degree recipients was lower in 2016 than in 2010, their average median annual earnings in 2016 ($48,270) were not measurably different from in 2010, in constant 2016 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, general medical and health services, nursing, and psychology. The same pattern held true for young adult bachelor's degree recipients in STEM fields. However, median annual earnings for young adults with bachelor's degrees in fine arts were lower in 2016 than in 2010 ($36,270 vs. $39,810), while median annual earnings for young adults with bachelor's degrees in communications and communications technologies were higher in 2016 than in 2010 ($45,260 vs. $44,310).

Endnotes:

[1] 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.
[2] 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.
[3] STEM fields include biological and biomedical sciences, computer and information sciences, engineering and engineering technologies, mathematics and statistics, and physical sciences and science technologies.
[4] All median annual earnings are reported in constant 2016 dollars, based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI).
[5] One percent is roughly equivalent to 76,000 bachelor's degree recipients.
[6] In 2016, there were at least 300,000 degree recipients in STEM fields, as well as in each of the following fields: biology; business management and administration; communications and communications technologies; fine arts; general medical and health services; nursing; and psychology.

Reference tables: *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, table 505.10

Related indicators and resources: Annual Earnings of Young Adults; Employment and Unemployment Rates by Educational Attainment; Employment of STEM College Graduates; Undergraduate Degree Fields

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