



Employment outlook for graduate-level occupations

Elka Torpey | August 2018

If you have or are considering getting a graduate degree, you'll want to know whether occupational openings are expected in your field. You also might be curious about what those occupations pay. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) can help.

Data in this article are based on the 101 occupations that BLS designates as typically requiring a graduate degree for entry. Of those, 63 typically require a doctoral or professional degree and 38, a master's degree. And, as is true at every level of education, wages vary in occupations that typically require these degrees.

Keep reading for an analysis of the wages and projected openings in selected "graduate-level" occupations.

Projections by entry-level education

BLS makes employment projections for more than 800 occupations. As part of this analysis, BLS also assesses the education that is typically needed for most people entering an occupation.

However, the education typically required for people at the entry level may differ from that of people who are already working in the occupation. For example, in 2015–16, about 39 percent of all [occupational therapists](#) ages 25 and older had a bachelor's degree as their highest level of educational attainment. But people looking to enter the field today usually need at least a master's degree from an accredited occupational therapy program. As a result, BLS designates occupational therapists as typically needing a master's degree for entry into the occupation.



Employment in master's-level occupations is projected to grow by almost 17 percent from 2016 to 2026, the fastest of any education level. Employment in doctoral- and professional-level occupations is projected to grow by about 13 percent, faster than the 7-percent average projected for all occupations.

Openings by career field

This article features six career fields in which BLS projects the most openings for graduate-level occupations:

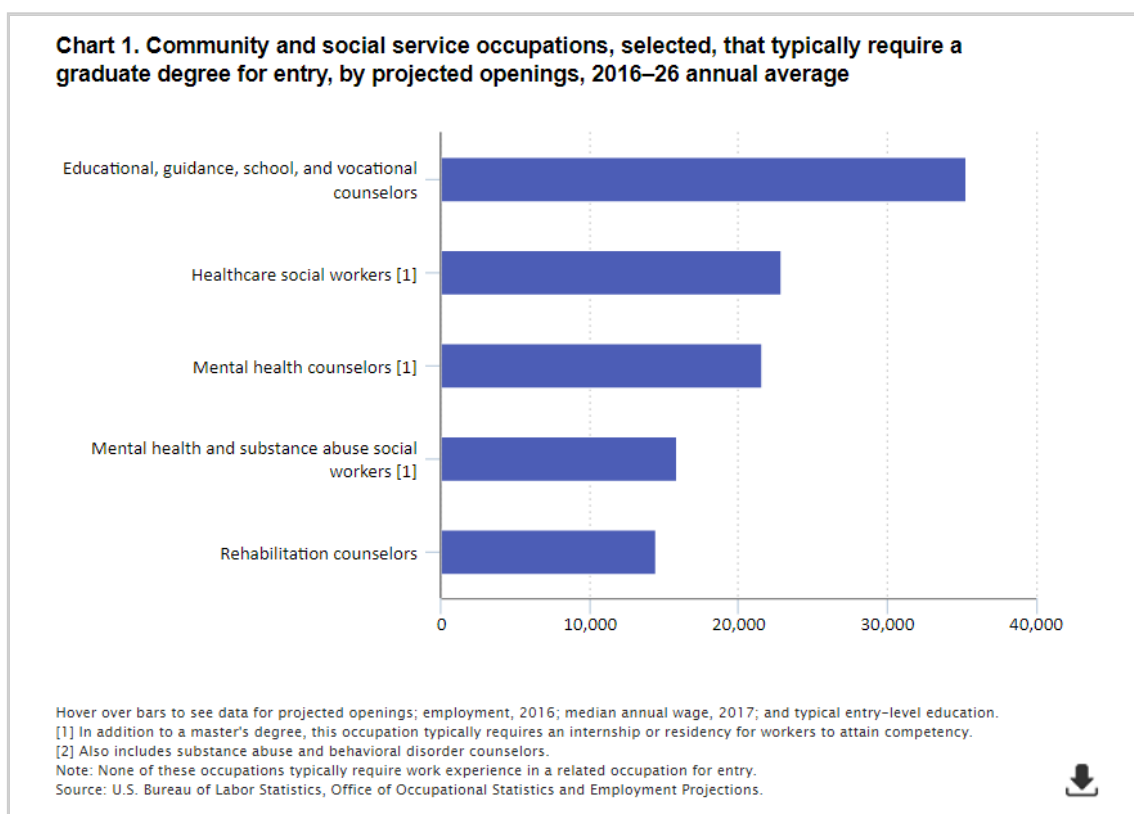
- [Community and social service](#)
- [Legal, education, and library](#)
- [Medical, dental, and nursing](#)
- [Other healthcare](#)
- [Postsecondary teaching](#)
- [Science, technology, engineering, and math \(STEM\) and social science](#)

For each career field, the charts that follow highlight the projected number of openings each year, on average, from 2016 to 2026 in the selected occupations. Many of these openings will result from the need to replace workers who leave an occupation. But some of them are expected to be from newly created jobs.

The charts also include information about 2017 median annual wages. (A median wage is the wage such that half of workers in the occupation earned more than that amount and half earned less. These wage data exclude self-employed workers.) The median annual wage was \$37,690 for all occupations in 2017. By comparison, the median wage was \$103,820 for doctoral- and professional-level occupations—the highest of any education level—and \$68,090 for master’s-level occupations.

Community and social service

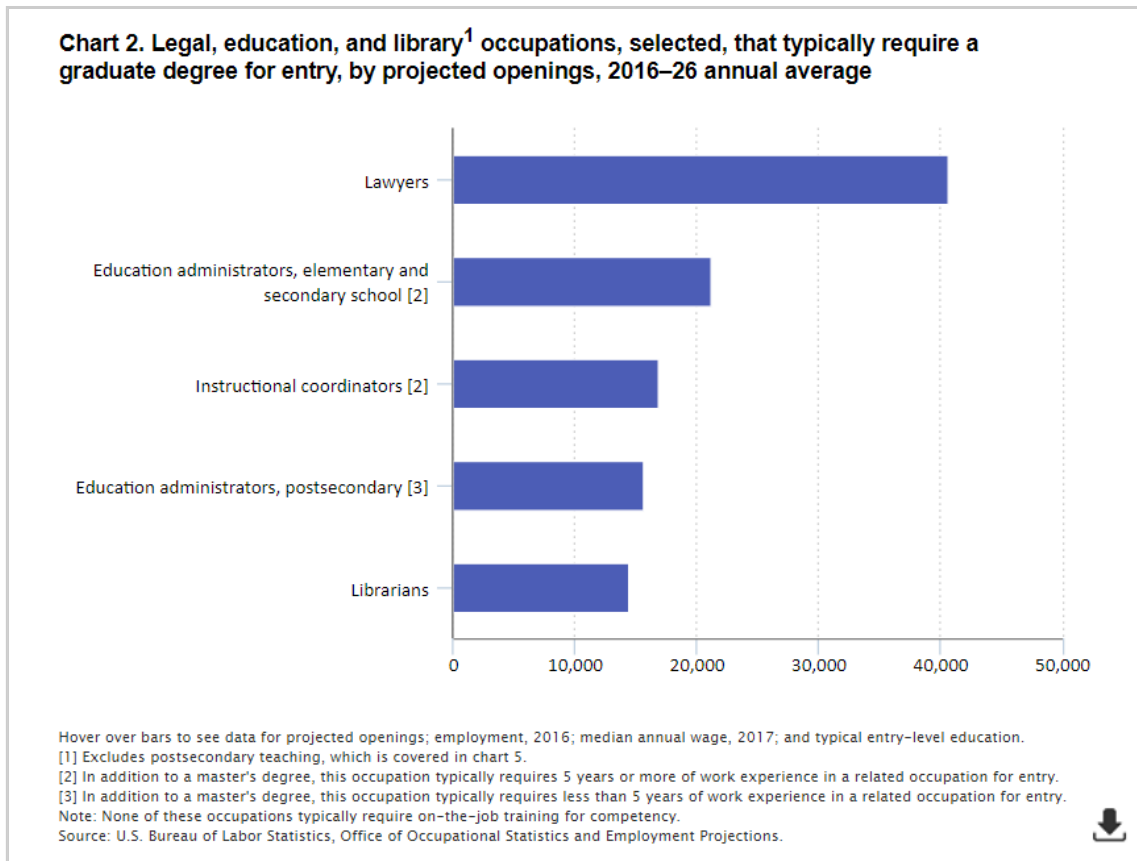
The [community and social service](#) occupations shown in chart 1 involve offering direction and helping people cope with life’s challenges. Of these occupations, [educational, guidance, and school counselors](#) is projected to have the most openings each year, on average, from 2016 to 2026.



A master’s degree is typically required for someone to enter any of the occupations shown in chart 1. Many of these occupations also typically require an internship or other supervised experience in a clinical setting for workers to become competent. In addition, workers may need a license to be employed in the occupation. Median annual wages for the occupations shown in the chart were among the lowest of the graduate-level occupations, although most were still higher than the median wage for all occupations.

Legal, education, and library

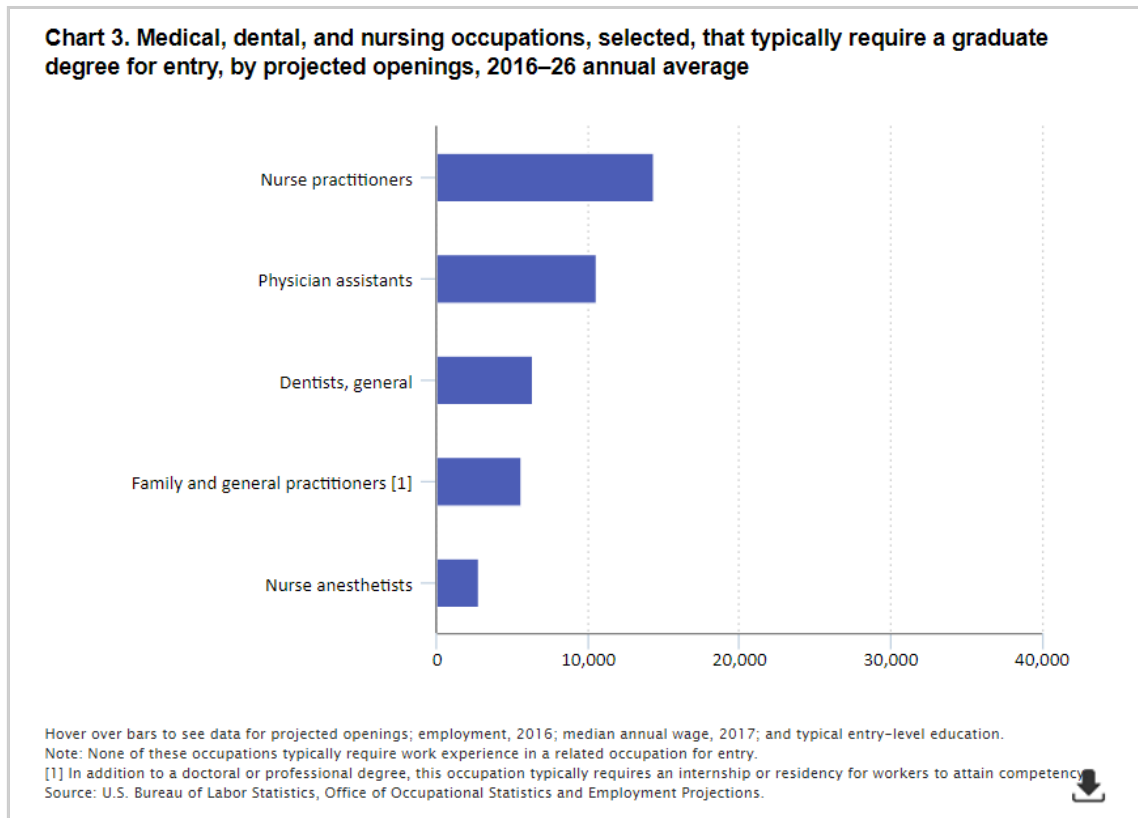
Tasks for workers in the [legal, education, and library](#) occupations shown in chart 2 may include conducting research or coordinating programs to help people learn. [Lawyers](#) is projected to have more openings each year, on average, than any other graduate-level occupation.



Licensure is commonly required for the occupations shown in chart 2. More than half of these occupations typically require related work experience in addition to a graduate degree. For example, [elementary and secondary school education administrators](#), also known as school principals, usually must have teaching experience. With a median annual wage of \$94,390, these administrators had the second-highest wage of the occupations in the chart.

Medical, dental, and nursing

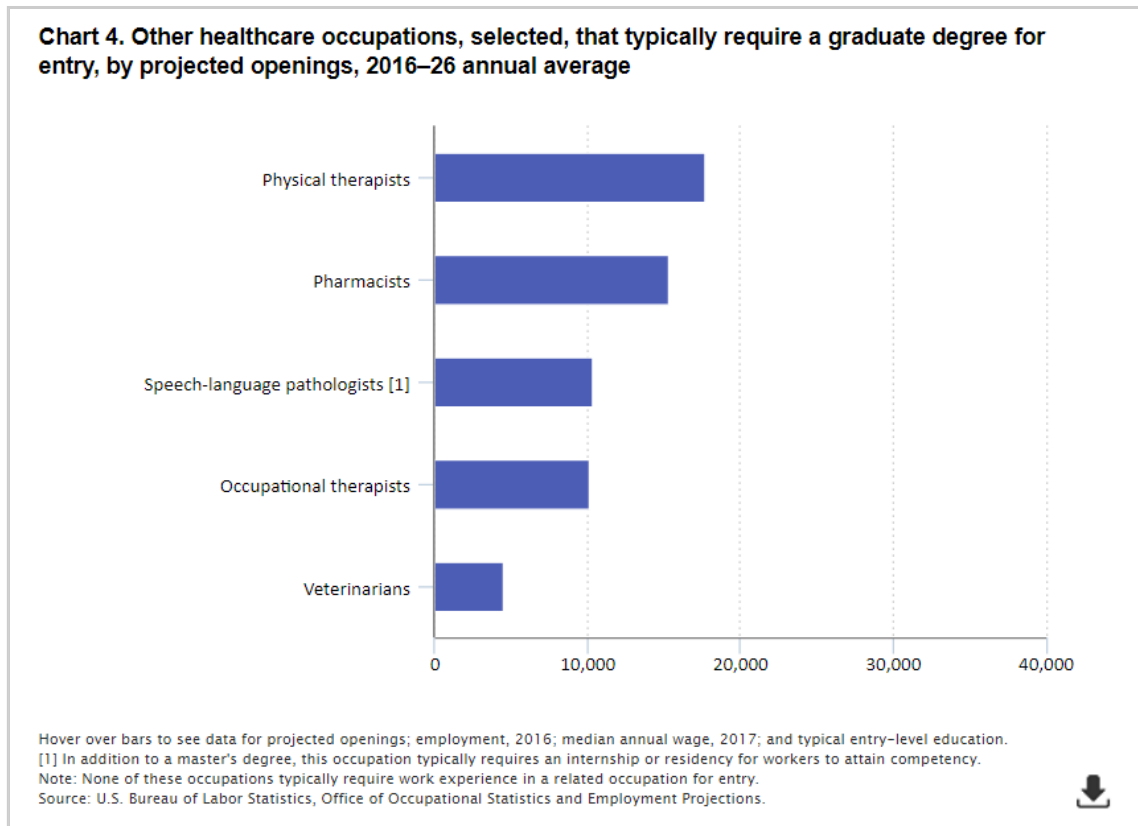
The [healthcare](#) occupations shown in chart 3 involve diagnosing illnesses, treating injuries, and providing preventive care to help people stay healthy. BLS projects about 14,400 openings each year, on average, for [nurse practitioners](#)—the most of all the occupations in the chart.



These occupations require workers to be licensed. Three of them typically require a master’s degree. [Family and general practitioners](#), like other types of doctors, must complete a residency program in addition to earning a [medical degree](#). All of the occupations in chart 3 had median annual wages above \$100,000, making them some of the highest paying graduate-level occupations.

Other healthcare

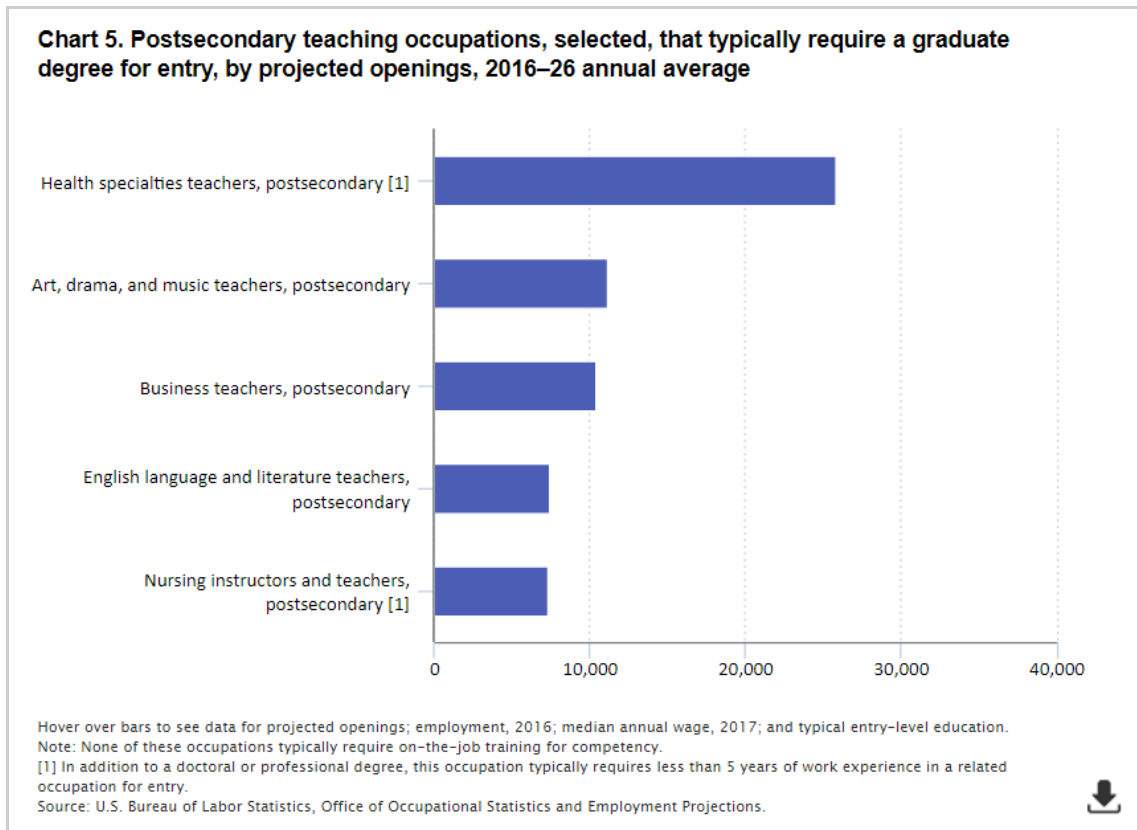
In addition to the occupations shown in chart 3, some other types of [healthcare](#) occupations that typically require a graduate degree are shown in chart 4. [Physical therapists](#) is projected to have the most openings each year, on average, of all the occupations in chart 4.



Three occupations shown in the chart typically require a doctoral or professional degree, and all of the occupations shown need a license. [Speech-language pathologists](#) typically require an internship in addition to a graduate degree. Median annual wages for each of the occupations in chart 4 were more than double the median wage for all occupations.

Postsecondary teaching

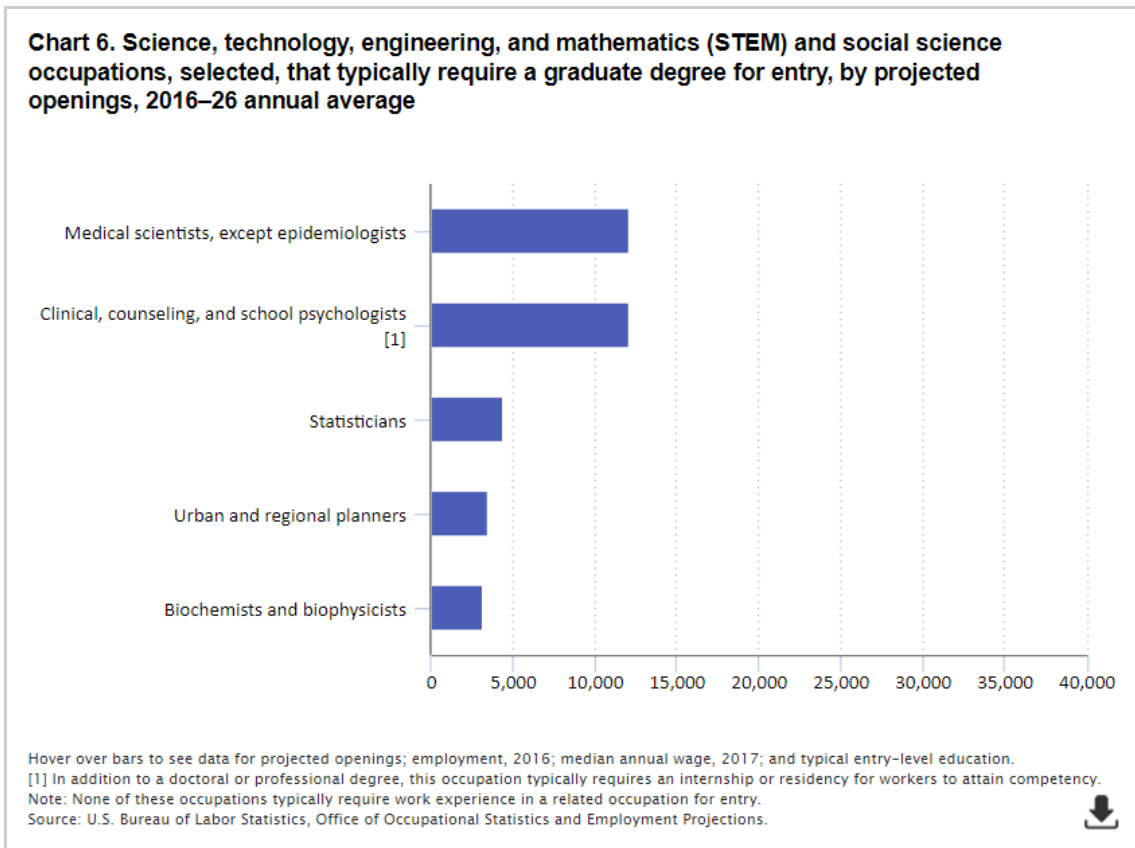
[Postsecondary teachers](#), also known as college and university professors, instruct students in a variety of academic, career, and technical subjects. Of the occupations shown in chart 5, health specialties teachers is projected to have the most annual average openings—and this occupation also had the highest median annual wage.



Postsecondary teachers typically need a Ph.D. in the subject that they plan to teach, but some might qualify with a master’s degree, depending on the field. Two of the occupations in chart 5—health specialties teachers and nursing instructors and teachers—also require work experience in a related occupation, and possibly a license, in addition to a graduate degree.

STEM and social science

Workers in [life, physical, and social science](#); [technology](#); [engineering](#); and [math](#) occupations may do research to find solutions to real-world problems and focus on advancing knowledge. Of the occupations shown in chart 6, [medical scientists](#) and [psychologists](#) are projected to have the most job openings, on average, through 2026.



Three of these occupations typically require a Ph.D. In addition to needing a doctoral degree, clinical, counseling, and school psychologists typically must complete an internship and obtain a license. [Biochemists and biophysicists](#) had the highest median wage of the occupations in the chart, \$91,190.

For more information

Learn more about the occupations in this article, as well as hundreds of others, in the [Occupational Outlook Handbook \(OOH\)](#). For example, the job outlook section of the *OOH* describes factors expected to influence growth, as well as the job prospects, for people interested in entering an occupation.

If you didn't see a particular occupation you're interested in mentioned in this article, it may be that the occupation is designated as typically requiring a level of education other than a graduate degree. Or it might be a graduate-level occupation that is projected to have some openings, but not as many as the other occupations selected for the charts in the article. A full list of occupational projections that includes education typically required for entry is available from the [Employment Projections](#) program.

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