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naturejobs

For love or money

A recent survey by the magazine *Money* confirms what many US academic scientists have always suspected. They are indeed paid disproportionately low salaries compared with other professions, given their skills, level of education, time spent training and workload.

The survey used data from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics to weigh up various salaries and puts being an academic research scientist in with two other professions — architects and chefs — that look glamorous from the outside but are less so if you're trying to make a living as one.

An assistant professor of microbiology earns \$39,000–67,000, according to the survey, and an entry-level medical researcher gets \$35,000. This may sound reasonable, but what makes these salaries disproportionate is the six or eight years it takes to reach PhD level — plus the subsequent years spent doing postdoctoral training, a phase that takes twice as long as it did ten years ago.

In terms of time, architects are reasonably similar to academic researchers. They spend about seven years completing undergraduate and master's degrees, then need another three years as interns working for licensed

architects, where they'll earn about \$35,000 a year — strikingly similar to the typical postdoc stipend. After three years they can take an exam to get their licence and eventually earn salaries of \$60,000 or more, equivalent to a scientist on the tenure track. But unlike scientists, architects tend to have high levels of student loans, as they don't tend to get funding during their graduate studies.

Chefs may not face such a long slog to a decent salary, but they probably face tougher day-to-day conditions. Until they make it to executive chef level, they'll earn an average of \$10–19 an hour, and will work long, hot days in the kitchen, under a lot of stress. Although a few become celebrities, with their own TV shows and lines of cookware, most do not. Like scientists and architects, they tend to work for love, not money.



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