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—JIGNASHA PATEL, Human Resources, Freescale Semiconductor

careers



U.S. Engineering Salaries Rise Sharply

EE starting salaries are up 13 percent; some other fields do even better

THE U.S. economy may be stuck in second gear, but for electrical engineers at all levels of experience, the job market just keeps getting better. Opportunities and salaries are increasing even more in Europe and Asia, where economies are healthy if not booming.

The field ranks third among bachelor’s degrees and second among master’s degrees on the list of majors that companies most want, says Andrea Koncz of the National Association for Colleges and Employers (NACE) in Bethlehem, Pa. Demand is particularly strong in defense, aerospace equipment, and medical and consumer electronics.

Even nontraditional employers are on the hunt. “We’re losing people to places like Disneyland,” says Boeing spokeswoman Cindy Wall.

The average offer this year was US \$56 512, up 3.5 percent from last year. That’s much higher than the \$49 427 average for civil engineers, but modest compared with the chemical engineers’ \$63 749, buoyed by the soaring fortunes of the petroleum-products sector. “What’s driving salaries in those industries can arguably be summed up in one word: energy,” says Tim McCreight, market-

ing manager at the American Institute of Chemical Engineers.

EE salaries, on the other hand, are rising in part because the United States is not producing enough grads to replace retiring employees. Wall thinks that this might be because students have more career options now and might not consider math and engineering as appealing as they were back in the space age. “Look at the Sputnik era,” she says. “There were so many engineers rolling into the workforce 40 years ago, and we don’t have that now.”

Engineers with analog, RF, and wireless skills, as well as those with postgraduate training, are becoming harder and harder to find. “If you’re a 20- to 30-year-old analog engineer, you’re sitting pretty right now,” says Jignasha Patel, a human resources director at Freescale Semiconductor in Austin, Texas. “It’s a buyer’s market for you.”

Telecom firms and chip makers are increasingly looking globally for new hires. Two-thirds of Freescale’s employees live and work outside the United States. The company recruits heavily in China, India, and Romania, where it is also looking for analog talent. These hot markets are seeing high salary increases of 10 to 12 percent, Patel says.

U.S. aerospace and defense contractors can’t cast their nets so broadly because EEs overseas can’t easily obtain the necessary security clearances. “We think there might not be enough people to replace the baby boomers,” Wall says.

Companies are also hiring more masters and Ph.D. grads to get the skills they need in analog and RF systems. At Texas Instruments, in Dallas, the percentage of new-grad hires with M.S. degrees or higher rose from 10 percent a decade ago to 54 percent last year and about 60 percent this year, says Diana Johnson, a campus recruiter for the company.

Recruiters are hiring more aggressively on campus, building stronger relationships with students and faculty. They are also starting earlier, often going out in the fall to look for the best candidates. Jeff Goodman of Raytheon says nowadays he will make firm job offers before Christmas. Companies are also hiring more interns; NACE says that almost 70 percent will get job offers, up from 57 percent in 2001.

More employers are offering signing bonuses, and the average bonus, now at \$4450, is 25 percent higher than last year’s. “Candidates at the top of their class are getting four or five offers, a blend of pretty aggressive base salary, sign-on bonus, and good relocation support,” says TI’s business recruiting manager, Scott Schmitt. “We’re not hearing from candidates that they don’t want to come to Texas Instruments due to salary as much as location or work lifestyle.”

The very best new grads—those with internship experience, advanced coursework, and some extra effort in their classes—sit in the catbird seat these days.

—PRACHI PATEL-PREDD

How do EE salaries fare against other fields over time? What are the best areas within EE? See The Data, last page of this issue.

