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ChE Salaries Stall

For as long as I can remember, AICHE has been conducting salary surveys of its members, and for almost as long as I've been an editor here, *CEP* has published the results. For the first time since 1992 (the earliest year for which I have data), the earnings of U.S. chemical engineers employed full-time have not risen.

This year's survey (pp. 20–25) reports a median salary of \$110,000 — which is less than the 2009 median of \$110,950, but statistically equivalent. Previous surveys reported two-year increases in median salary ranging from 5.6% (1996–1998) to 12.6% (2005–2007), with an average of about 8%.

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, annual raises held fairly steady, ranging from 3.9% to about 6%, with a mean of 4.6%. These averages are based on data from all respondents who reported salaries for the current and previous year, including those whose salaries decreased or remained the same. Five percent of this year's respondents experienced salary decreases, and another 20% saw no change at all. When those negative numbers and zeroes are included, the median raise was 3.2% — the lowest it has been in the past two decades.

Much of this stagnation is probably a result of the financial crisis that began in the fall of 2008. Our last survey collected data in early 2009, before the effects of the recession could be widely reflected in salaries. This year's results show how hard an impact it has had.

The outlook for graduating engineers gives us reason for hope. According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers' (NACE) Spring Salary Survey, the average offer to chemical engineers in the Class of 2011 is \$66,886. This puts chemical engineering once again at the top of the highest-paid-majors list. (Petroleum engineers received offers that were one-third higher, averaging \$89,857, but the sample size of only seven offers was too small to allow a statistically valid comparison to be made.)

Another encouraging piece of news out of NACE is that employers expect to increase their hiring by 19.3% this year, and that oil/gas extraction companies and chemical manufacturers are among those with the most aggressive hiring plans. It will be interesting to see what the final tally of offers to the Class of 2011 reveals this fall.

Getting back to our own survey: We saw some interesting changes in the geographic distribution of salaries. The Gulf states continue to have the highest salaries, although the median is the same as it was in 2009 (\$120,000). The Middle Atlantic region retained its number two rank, despite a \$4,000 drop in median salary (to \$110,000). The largest decrease occurred in New England, where the median fell more than \$11,000 to \$98,950, moving that region from fourth to seventh. Only the Southeast region saw an increase in median salary — a \$5,000 increase to \$110,000, raising it from sixth to tied for second. Our typical analyses were not able to explain the changes, but we are continuing to study the data and look for correlations.

The article on pages 20–25 provides basic salary data. As this issue is being printed, we are working on an expanded article containing additional information — including data on retirement and other benefits, and more detailed breakdowns of some of the tables included here. All AICHE members will be able to obtain the longer article from *CEP*'s website, www.aidhe.org/cep, in early June. It should be posted by the time you receive this issue.

Cynthia F. Mascone
Editor-in-Chief

