

Pay in Private Industry and State and Local Governments, 1994

BY JOHN E. BUCKLEY

Professional and administrative employees in private industry generally enjoyed higher earnings than their counterparts in State and local governments. However, in other white-collar occupations—technical, protective services, and clerical—the earnings of government employees were higher. The earnings of blue-collar occupations were about equal in the private and public sectors.

In its 1994 surveys, the Bureau's Occupational Compensation Survey (OCS) program obtained earnings data for 46 occupational categories. Most of the occupations selected for the study are found in a variety of industries, and the detail obtained from the surveyed jobs produced 145 work levels, ranging from single-level jobs (mostly blue-collar) to occupations with 8 work levels (engineers). This examination of earnings in private industry and State and local government is confined to the jobs and associated work levels that met publication criteria for both industry sectors.¹ This article highlights some of the differences found between the two industry sectors.² Charts 1 and 2 illustrate the mixed result in average

earnings for selected private industry and government white- and blue-collar workers in highly populated occupations.

Professional and administrative occupations

Published estimates are available for 44 work levels in the professional and administrative occupational group. For 29 of these estimates, differences in average earnings for workers performing at the same level were 5 percent or more between private industry and government, with a majority of the estimates (27 of 29) favoring private employees. The widest earnings gap was for attorneys, level IV, where the private industry weekly average (\$1,720) was 29 percent higher than that of government. Registered nurses (level II specialists) and budget analysts, level IV, averaged 10 and 6 percent more, respectively, in government than in the private

sector. The 15 remaining published estimates for professional and administrative workers showed that employees in government averaged between 96 and 104 percent of the earnings of their private sector counterparts, with each sector about equally sharing the high and low positions. (See table 1.)

Technical and protective service occupations

Technical and protective service workers in State and local government had higher earnings than their counterparts in private industry in 14 of the 23 work levels available for comparison. The introduction of nursing occupations to the 1994 survey greatly affected this comparison: salaries for government workers outpaced salaries for their private sector counterparts in 6 of the 7 work levels studied for licensed practical nurses and nursing assistants. The advantage enjoyed

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Chart 1. Weekly salaries for selected white-collar occupations in private industry and State and local governments, September 1994

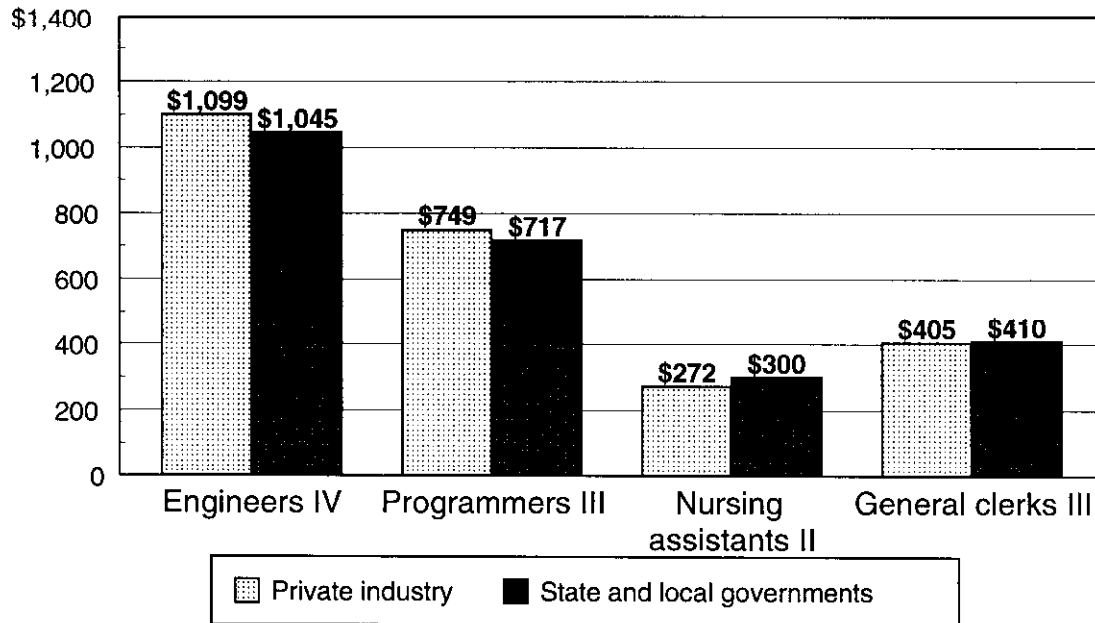


Chart 2. Hourly wages for selected blue-collar occupations in private industry and State and local governments, September 1994.

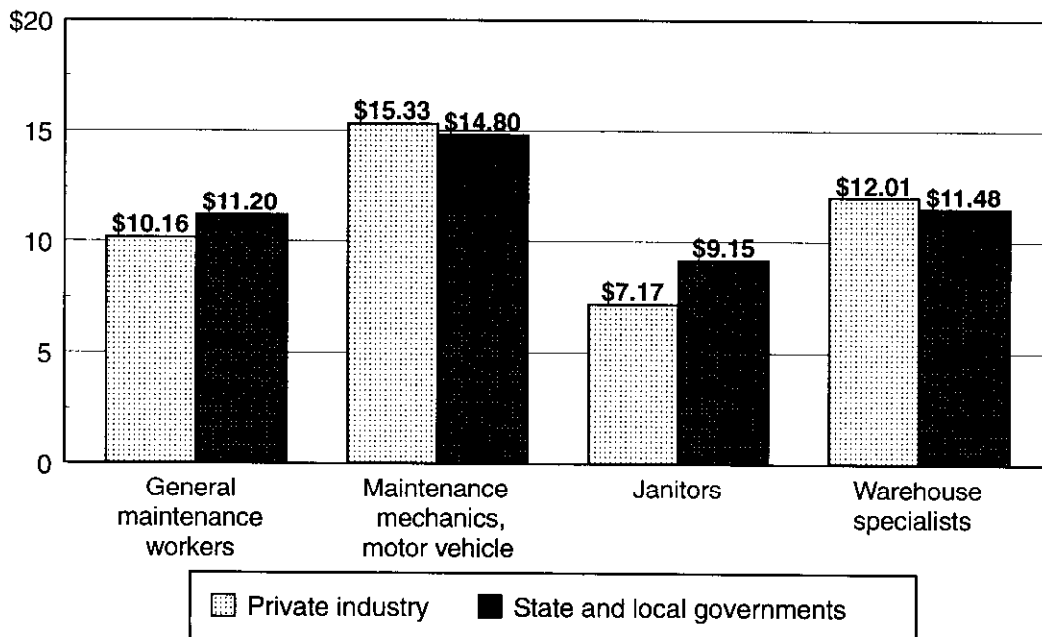


Table 1. Mean weekly earnings of professional and administrative occupations by work levels in private industry and State and local governments, September 1994

	Level I		Level II		Level III		Level IV		Level V		Level VI	
	Private	Government	Private	Government	Private	Government	Private	Government	Private	Government	Private	Government
Accountants	\$494	\$510	\$604	\$582	\$774	\$733	\$1003	\$922	\$1298	\$1149	-	-
Attorneys	768	692	1049	860	1368	1091	1720	1331	-	-	-	-
Engineers	659	627	768	761	904	890	1099	1045	1320	1216	\$1575	\$1326
Registered nurses	590	576	711	705	960	878	-	-	-	-	-	-
Nurse specialists	-	-	762	837	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Nurse anesthetists	-	-	-	-	1464	1489	-	-	-	-	-	-
Budget analysts	-	-	619	632	806	833	918	972	-	-	-	-
Buyer/contracting specialists	507	482	647	609	865	770	1027	966	-	-	-	-
Computer programmers	539	478	624	575	749	717	884	854	-	-	-	-
Computer systems analysts	754	699	892	889	1056	973	-	-	-	-	-	-
Computer systems analysts supervisors/managers	1143	1072	1333	1227	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Personnel specialists	491	511	584	604	765	799	1006	953	1302	1186	-	-
Personnel supervisors/managers	1110	979	1389	1186	1737	1436	-	-	-	-	-	-

NOTE: Dashes indicate that data did not meet publication criteria or the work level was not studied.

Table 2. Mean weekly earnings of technical and protective service occupations by work levels in private industry and State and local governments, September 1994

	Level I		Level II		Level III		Level IV		Level V	
	Private	Government	Private	Government	Private	Government	Private	Government	Private	Government
Computer operators	\$347	\$358	\$434	\$429	\$559	\$545	\$668	\$641	-	-
Drafters	390	373	479	504	605	621	-	-	-	-
Engineering technicians	-	-	-	-	610	606	739	749	-	-
Engineering technicians, civil	321	349	426	457	570	555	699	672	\$872	\$771
Licensed practical nurses	391	462	453	427	527	542	-	-	-	-
Nursing assistants	236	322	272	300	349	425	444	480	-	-
Firefighters ¹	588	632	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Police officers	558	661	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

¹ Firefighters is a single-level job.

NOTE: Dashes indicate data did not meet publication criteria or the work level was not studied.

by government workers ranged from a modest 1 percent for engineering technicians, level IV, to 36 percent for nursing assistants, level I. (See table 2.)

The weekly average rate for government nursing assistants, level I (\$322), deviated from expected behavior by exceeding the average rate of nursing assistants, level II, in both industry sectors. A similar anomaly occurred for licensed practical nurses. This type of deviation surfaces occasionally when staffing requirements of high-paying

establishments call for large numbers of workers at lower work levels (relative to their needs for higher level workers), while the reverse staffing pattern is occurring in lower-paying establishments.

Average weekly earnings of computer operators and civil engineering technicians were generally higher in the private sector than public ones at higher work levels. The widest gap was for civil engineering technicians, level V, where the government rate (\$771) was only 88 percent of the private

industry rate. More than 98 percent of protective service workers were employed in governments, where their pay exceeded that of their private industry counterparts by 7 percent in the case of firefighters and 18 percent for police officers, level I.

Clerical occupations

Clerical workers in State and local governments were higher paid than similar workers in private industry nearly 60 percent of the time. In the 23 observed work

levels, government workers were higher paid in 13 instances, lower paid in 9, and equally paid in 1. The widest gaps among the 23 observations were for word processors, level III, where average weekly earnings of \$593 for private industry employees were 23 percent higher than earnings of comparable workers in government. The largest advantage of government employees over private industry workers was for general clerks, level I, where the average for government (\$289) was 8 percent higher. (See table 3.)

Maintenance and toolroom occupations

Among the 9 maintenance and toolroom jobs and levels available for comparison, 6 were higher paying in the private sector, ranging from about a 4 percent advantage for

motor vehicle mechanics and electronics technicians, level III, to an 11 percent advantage for electronics technicians, level II. However, the average hourly rate for government maintenance machinists produced the largest pay advantage among all 9 jobs, averaging 22 percent more than the \$16.58 rate for private industry machinists. (See table 4.)

Material movement and custodial occupations

In 6 of the 10 material movement and custodial observations available for comparison, State and local government employees enjoyed higher earnings than private industry workers. For these 6 observations, the differences in average hourly earnings ranged from a one-cent advantage for material

handling laborers to a 50 percent difference for guards, level I. About 90 percent of guards, level I, are employed in private sector service-producing industries, most of them in low-paying guard services establishments. The pay advantage of government workers drops to about 6 percent when compared with private industry guards who do not work for guard services firms.

Employment in the guard services industry is often of short duration, and the termination of an establishment's contract is frequently coupled with the termination of the employees' services. However, it is not uncommon for the same workers to continue their duties with the guard services company that wins the new contract. In contrast, State and local government positions are more often career service jobs. (See table 5.)

Table 3. Mean weekly earnings of office clerical occupations by work levels in private industry and State and local governments, September 1994

	Level I		Level II		Level III		Level IV		Level V	
	Private	Government	Private	Government	Private	Government	Private	Government	Private	Government
Accounting clerks	\$298	\$298	\$359	\$378	\$438	\$451	\$535	\$514	-	-
General clerks	267	289	314	337	405	410	485	462	-	-
Key entry operators	317	327	400	404	-	-	-	-	-	-
Personnel assistants(employment) ...	313	304	393	394	482	491	555	591	-	-
Secretaries	384	356	463	438	538	503	638	584	\$771	\$711
Switchboard operator-receptionists ¹ ...	338	345	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Word processors	370	373	451	468	593	481	-	-	-	-

¹ Switchboard operator-receptionists is a single-level job.

NOTE: Dashes indicate data did not meet publication criteria or work level was not studied.

Table 4. Mean hourly earnings of maintenance and toolroom occupations in private industry and State and local governments, September 1994

	Private industry	Government
General maintenance workers	\$10.16	\$11.20
Maintenance electricians	17.33	17.11
Maintenance electronic technicians, level I	11.36	11.47
Maintenance electronic technicians, level II	17.52	15.79
Maintenance electronic technicians, level III	19.89	19.08
Maintenance machinists	16.58	20.21
Maintenance mechanics, machinery	16.26	15.06
Maintenance mechanics, motor vehicle	15.33	14.80
Maintenance pipefitters	18.94	18.01

Table 5. Mean hourly earnings of material movement and custodial occupations in private industry and State and local governments, September 1994

	Private industry	Government
Guards, level I	\$ 6.62	\$ 9.90
Guards, level II	11.58	11.51
Janitors	7.17	9.15
Material handling laborers	9.18	9.19
Shipping/receiving clerks	10.13	9.86
Truck drivers, light truck	8.80	9.88
Truck drivers, medium truck	14.02	11.65
Truck drivers, heavy truck	12.61	13.21
Truck drivers, tractor trailer	13.69	16.82
Warehouse specialists	12.01	11.48

—Endnotes—

¹ Thirty-nine jobs with 109 associated work levels met the publication criteria for both industry sectors. Data for some of the higher work levels did not meet publication criteria for State and local government.

For additional information on work levels and the scope of the OCS, see Robert W. Van Giezen,

“Occupational Pay in Private Goods- and Service-Producing Industries,” *Compensation and Working Conditions*, June 1996, pp. 29-34; John E. Buckley, “Occupational Pay Across Regions in 1994,” *Compensation and Working Conditions*, June 1996, pp. 35-38; and *Occupational Compensation Survey: National Summary, 1994*,

Bulletin 2479, Bureau of Labor Statistics, June 1996.

²For a more comprehensive examination of private and public pay differences based on 1993 data, see Michael A. Miller, “The Public-Private Pay Debate: What Do the Data Show?” *Monthly Labor Review*, May 1996, pp. 18-29.