Salary Negotiation: Interns and Recent College Graduates Fall 2025

FULTON SCHOOLS OF ENGINEERING | career center

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The focus of this presentation is for interns and students graduating with their degrees. Thus the qualifications for the job are primarily your academics, with maybe some experience as an intern, or similar.

This topic gets way more complex later in your career – we will talk about that a little at the end.

Negotiation: Be Prepared

Elements:

- The interview/salary/compensation process
- How offers are delivered
- What steps you take: things to consider, and how to respond
- Things to think about later

The Good News: At this career level, …

- Employers have a good idea about pay:
  - Academic performance
  - Experience
  - Market conditions

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Most larger employers who are hiring new college graduates, or interns, have done their own assessments on pay. Many have a salary matrix or have a policy regarding entry-level salaries.

As recent college graduates, or as interns, your qualifications include your academics and your (limited) experience.

- “Academic performance”: Top students, from in-demand majors, with experience, command top pay.
- “Experience”: Includes experiences using technical skills and overall job experiences
- “Market conditions”: can include demand for this major, the specific job location, the job itself, and overall economic conditions.

Most employers are ethical with job offers and want to be competitive with offers. Their goal is not to cheat you. Why? You switching jobs as soon as you figure that out is not a good business strategy for any employer.

So, who is in the best position to negotiate?

- Experienced students (ie, several years of full time work experience, applicable to the job) can negotiate more effectively.
- BUT: everyone can **attempt negotiation** on some compensation elements.

So, going step-by-step….

On the job application: what do I tell them?

Employers may use a salary question on an application:

- Salary history - how much you were paid in the past
- Salary requirement - how much you expect to get paid

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Salary history: For most students, the questions is not relevant – you don't have history working this kind of role. Answer honestly. Some states do not allow this question on job applications, since it is not relevant in so many situations.

Salary requirement:
Don't panic about this question. They can, and may, offer you more than you indicate, less than you indicate, … .
You want to be prepared to answer this question and move onto other parts of the job interviewing process.
So, do your homework – look on Glassdoor, talk to other students, …
Remember that application forms are usually the same for every job at a company. Your answer to this question may not be as important to the company for you, an intern/new college grad, as it is for a senior manager.

Before/during the interview: what do I tell them?

If asked about your desired salary, express:

- Interest in the opportunity
- Willingness to discuss salary once you understand the position

If pressed for a response: provide a range

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The goal of the interview is to get an offer – try to stay on that track (discussing the job, and your qualifications). If needed, state that you need to understand more about the job, and give a range to start.

How can those details, about the job, affect the pay? Some examples: does the role require any of these?

- *Work location: Higher-cost of living area (some jobs are posted for multiple locations)*
- *Work location: Fully remote, assigned office, remote job sites, driving to job sites daily, traveling to customer locations, …*
- *Travel: How much travel is expected? How does that travel occur (day trips, or week-long, or month-long)?*
- *Work hours: 8/day, 10/day, 12/day, …*
- *Work days: Fixed schedule, or rotating work days?*
- *Overtime: is there an on-call element to the job?*

All of these elements can affect what you would expect to be paid.

EXPERIENCED Applicants: be sure to talk range right up front, so that you are interviewing for the level of job that you want.

Again, your goal is to move along to the interview.

The offer: First response

You are called/contacted about an offer:

- Thank the rep for the offer
- Express your interest in the company and the position
- Ask clarifying questions about the position if you have any
- Ask for time to evaluate the offer
- **Ask for the offer in writing**

Congratulations! You succeeded in the interview, and the company contacts you about "wanting to make you an offer".
Typically, the company schedules a call with you, and will provide you with a lot of details.
Be prepared to take careful notes.

You need to have "reasonable" time to consider the offer. That time starts when you get the written offer.

First thing: check the written offer. If there are any elements to the written offer that differ from the verbal offer, contact the company immediately – this is an error and they need to issue you a new offer letter.
Note, some organizations will not provide a written offer at this point. If that's the case, then proceed using the conditional information that they provide.
Now, let's assess the offer…

The offer: Evaluate

Carefully consider the job from these perspectives:

the position,
the organization,
the industry,
the location,
the pay ☺,
And potential for growth

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Position, organization, industry; location: these are facts.
Pay: fact
Potential for growth: requires assessment – very important for new college graduates.
Training: Will you get the training to be successful in your career, so that you can take advantage of that growth?
Let's look at pay in detail…

The offer: "Total Compensation"

Beyond salary, compensation may include:

- **Signing bonus:** one time bonus to join the company
- **Annual bonus(es):** many variations:
  - Basis: % of salary or wages, or similar
  - Eligibility: same basis for all employees; or differ by job title, organization, or location
  - Timing: annual; or every quarter, or __
  - How paid: $; or stock, or something else
  - Payout: to you, as payroll; or added to your 401K plan, or something else
  - Structure: about the same every year; or very good in good years and 0 in bad ones

Some of these are clear on the company website, and some are valued in your offer letter.
Pay careful attention to "variable compensation" – bonuses – lots of variation in these structures.
Bonus structures can vary a lot. Some companies have multiple bonuses.
If there are bonus plans in the offer, you want to ask about the history of payout when you call to get information about the offer details.

Other compensation elements

- Health care plan
- Retirement: 401k contribution, or similar
- Tuition reimbursement
- Student loan repayment
- Paid time off: vacation, other forms of time off
- Stock:
  - Stock purchase plan (purchase company shares at discount)
  - Restricted Stock Units (RSUs), other forms

Some of these are clear on the company website, and some are valued in your offer letter.
Most of these cannot be negotiated – they are "benefits". But, they may have value to you.
Pay attention to details if these are important to you.
For example, some of these may not be immediately available, or may be otherwise limited. Examples:

- Tuition reimbursement: only available after X years at the company, or only for 50% of total cost

Bottom line: what's this worth to you?

The offer: Get more details

- After you have received the offer, **request a phone call** to review the details
- You want to use this call to gather information

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Can also do by email if you have to, but phone is preferable.
If there are any discrepancies between what you were told, and the written offer, bring it up immediately with the representative.

The call: Sample questions

1. Is there relocation assistance for this role?
2. Can you tell me more about the bonus(es)?

   Pay attention to bonus structures. Ask for history of the bonus payouts.
3. What is the **hiring** salary range for the position?
4. What is the **full** salary range for the position?
5. Can you tell me if my *<specific skill / experience>* was considered ?
6. Can you tell me when my salary will be evaluated again?

→ *Is there room to negotiate?*

You might want to start this conversation with some simple questions, such as “How frequently will I be paid (weekly, etc)? When would my first payday occur?”
Then, work toward more complex questions, like these shown here.
You may get answers to these questions, *and you may not – be relaxed and ready for “no” answers.* ***Your goal: determine if there is flexibility.***

Hiring range: what is the hiring range for new employees for this role?
Full Salary Range: for a given role, what is the pay range? This would include all employees in this job title or job code.

Some employers can negotiate one time items that don’t add to your annual salary like relocation and signing bonuses- these may come with your commitment to stay a certain amount of time or have to pay them or a portion back.

The counter-offer: Be prepared

Have the conversation—or maybe the first of TWO conversations

- Bring up all elements of the offer that are in question

Make your case:

- You have other offers
- Others have offers
- You have some ___ [experience that was not considered, …]

It's better to do this by phone than email.
If you want to negotiate more than one thing (example: pay and bonus) – address both in the same conversation. Don't get an answer to one, and then try to negotiate other elements.
Be ready to wait for answers: sometimes the person you are speaking to is not the final authority

Offer acceptance: Timing

- The company should give you a reasonable amount of time to consider the offer
- If you need more time, ask for it as soon as you can:
  - Don't wait until the day that the response is due to ask for an extension
- ASU's policy on offer timing:
  - ASU recommends that employers who recruit Fulton Schools of Engineering students follow the NACE Advisory: https://www.naceweb.org/career-development/organizational-structure/advisory-opinion-setting-reasonable-deadlines-for-job-offers/ This allows students appropriate time to consider their offers thoroughly and decrease the risk of reneging.
  - ASU's policy: https://public.powerdms.com/ASU/documents/1560597

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How much time to evaluate?
If you need more time, how much more do you need? If you are waiting for your dream job, most companies know that when you say you need weeks of time that they aren't YOUR dream job.

FAQs

Can I ask for more (salary, bonus, time to consider, …)? Will they get mad?

- – Yes, you can, and no, they won't
- – Be ready for NO

FAQs

I got an offer that I like, but it is lower than another offer I have.

- Contact the company and let them know:
  - You really like their company
  - Their pay is lower than another offer: *and you need to tell them what you want in terms of pay*
- What else should I know?
  - Be prepared for NO
  - They may offer you something in between

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This is the scenario that can happen with intern as well as full time jobs.
Location, industry, and other factors affect the offer. Remember: companies want to be competitive.

FAQs

What is the difference between a Non-Disclosure Agreement and a Non-Compete Agreement?

– Non-Disclosure Agreement: you agree not to **disclose confidential company information**
  - Very standard
– Non-Compete: you agree not to **work for competitors for a given time after leaving the company**
  - Not very standard for this level role
  - Not legal in California, Minnesota, North Dakota, Oklahoma

Non-compete agreements are also restricted in some other states/locations (ie, by income level, etc):
https://eig.org/state-noncompete-map/
NDA: very standard
NCA: if asked to sign, contact our office for help – not standard for most entry-level roles

FAQs

Where do I find information on salaries?

- Glassdoor
- Fulton Schools Career Center website:
  - https://career.engineering.asu.edu/resumesandresources/interviewing/winter-2024-salary-data/
  - https://www.jobsearchintelligence.com/salary-calculator-intro-etc
- Friends and classmates ☺

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Friends and classmates: have the most fresh and credible information.

Note: At later career levels, …

- Salary discussion is more complex:
  - Be prepared to talk salary right up front - imperative
  - Many more variables:
    - Experience: technical, leadership, management
    - Reputation of previous employers
    - Skills, and degree of experience applying them
    - Certifications and similar
    - Industry knowledge, and perception of leadership in industry
    - Client base
    - …

If you have experience, that will be the basis for your offer.
Some students, especially graduate students, have work experience that will qualify them for higher-level roles. In this case, be prepared to negotiate based on your experience.

Additional Information

- **Resume samples** https://career.engineering.asu.edu/resumesandresources/resumes/
- **Resume Reviews: SkillsFirst** https://skillsfirst.com/organizations/asu-engineering
  - AI tools to review content, check for keywords, and compare to a job description
  - Submit your résumé for staff review without an appointment
- **Fulton Schools Career Center website** https://career.engineering.asu.edu/
  - 24/7 access to presentations and tools
- **1:1 appointments**
  Left side of your Handshake landing page: Select "Career Center"
  - Follow the prompts for "Appointments"->"Schedule a New Appointment"->"Fulton Schools of Engineering…"->*select your appointment type*

Here are some notes