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Responding to “The Salary Question” in an Interview

If early in the interview you are asked what your salary expectations are, the best response is: "What would a person with my background and qualifications typically earn in this position with your company?" The best response if asked late in the interview process is: "I am ready to consider your very best offer." This is one time you don't want to be specific. If you give specifics, you lose - you will either be too low or too high, costing yourself thousands of dollars or possibly even keeping yourself from getting the job.

If you are pressed by the interviewer for specific numbers, don't put them off with more than one "end run" response. First, make sure you have done your homework on the expected salary range for your field. Salary surveys (e.g., salary.com, salaryexpert.com, and wageweb.com) are skewed toward the high end, possibly because only the best paid graduates responded, while those with average or low pay did not want to admit what they were earning. So take them with a large dose of conservative adjustment.

Students can visit Career Services to examine the **NACE survey** (National Association of Colleges & Employers) to examine salaries of new graduates, both nationally and in the Midwest

Armed with this information, ask the interviewer: "What is the general salary range for new hires in this position?" If the entire range is acceptable, respond with: "That would be within my expected starting range, depending on the entire salary and benefits package." If only the top end of the range is acceptable, respond with: "The upper end of the range is what I have been discussing with the other companies that are currently interested." If the range is below your expected starting salary range, respond with: "The other companies I am currently speaking with are considering me at a salary somewhat higher than that range. Of course, money is only one factor and I will be evaluating the overall package."

Do your best not to get pinned to specific numbers, but if they do mention a number and ask if it would be acceptable to you, respond by saying: "I would encourage you to make the formal offer. What is most important is the opportunity to work for you and your company. I am confident that your offer will be competitive." Remember; don't do any negotiating until you have a formal offer in hand.

For further information about salary negotiating and benefits, visit:

<http://www.niu.edu/careerservices/handouts.html>

Scroll down to the last table entitled: "Job Search & Career-Related Handouts & Articles"