

### The **INSTITUTE** for Public Policy & Economic Development at Wilkes University

A partnership among King's College, Keystone College, Lackawanna College, Luzerne County Community College, Marywood University, Misericordia University, Penn State/Wilkes-Barre, The Commonwealth Medical College, University of Scranton, and Wilkes University

**The Institute for Public Policy & Economic Development (The Institute)** launched a polling program in 2014. The Institute will regularly poll students at its partnering higher education institutions. These polling and survey research services are part of The Institute's menu of services offered to all types of clients.

The purpose of this poll was to ascertain the views and experiences of the college students of Northeastern Pennsylvania. The Institute worked with each of its partner institutions to deploy the survey. Topics covered in the survey included class year, major, graduate school plans, internship experience, views toward finding a job after graduation, and views toward staying in Northeastern Pennsylvania after graduation.

The sample for this poll includes a significant portion of Northeastern Pennsylvania's college and university students. Students from all class years, a variety of majors, and part-time and graduate students are well-represented in the data.

**Students have a high level of interest in internships; the majority of undergraduate seniors had already completed an internship related to their chosen field.**

A large majority of students have a strong interest in completing an internship; four out of five students either had already interned or planned to pursue an internship. The high percentage of students completing internships, particularly unpaid internships, suggests that students place a high value on the experience, skills, and connections gained while interning. About 60 percent of students completed their internships at organizations in Northeastern Pennsylvania. Across class years and majors, the vast majority of students who have completed internships indicated that they were related to their major or field of study.

The majority of students reported that their internships were unpaid, but about 58 percent of students that completed internships received academic credit for them. Across majors, there is a high degree of variation in the percentage of interns who were paid. There are also big differences between majors in receiving academic credit for internships. Engineering students were most likely to be paid for internships and least likely to receive academic credit; the inverse is true for education majors.

**Graduate degrees are extremely important to students, especially to students in Science, Mathematics, and Health Care.**

Many students have plans to attend graduate school. Over half of undergraduate respondents planned on attending graduate school, and another quarter responded that they were not sure. This shows the importance of providing graduate programs locally, as well as that many young people perceive graduate degrees to be a worthwhile investment of time and money. Similarly, over 93 percent of students responded that a graduate degree was somewhat important or very important in today's economy. Conversely, less than five percent indicated that they believe a graduate degree is not at all or not very important. The decision to attend graduate school is quite dependent on major. Nearly three quarters of undergraduates majoring in science/mathematics and health care plan to continue their studies beyond a bachelor's degree. This suggests that there is a need to offer a variety of graduate level science and health care programs within Northeastern Pennsylvania in order to keep these students living and working in the region. Engineering students, on the other hand, are less likely to plan on attending graduate school place a relatively low importance on graduate degrees for their careers.



*"It is exceptional to note that our region's higher education students believe their educational experience has prepared them well for their careers. It is incumbent upon higher education to teach our students not only the technical knowledge to succeed in their chosen fields, but all the skills needed to succeed in the workforce."*

**Patrick F. Leahy, Ed.D.,  
President, Wilkes University**



*It is encouraging to see that the great majority of our students intend to complete an internship. The academic learning from our classrooms is then translated into real-world practice, creating a future that is bright for our region. Further, a majority of students see value in completing graduate education, which will provide an even higher level of skills for the area workforce."*

**Thomas J. Botzman, Ph.D.,  
President, Misericordia  
University**

## POST GRADUATION PLANS — WHAT'S NEXT?

**In general, students have moderate levels of job search anxiety; graduate students and students in STEM fields have less anxiety.**

Students report a moderate level of job-search related anxiety. The largest shares of students reported being “somewhat anxious” or “a little anxious” about finding a job after graduation. Similarly, many more respondents feel that finding a job in their chosen field will be somewhat easy or somewhat difficult rather than very easy or very difficult.

Graduate students are somewhat more confident than undergraduate students about finding a job after graduation. Only about half of graduate students are at least somewhat anxious about finding a job, lower than the undergraduate population. Graduate students were also more likely than undergraduates to believe that finding a job in their field will be at least somewhat easy: nearly half of Master’s and professional degree students, and nearly two thirds of doctoral students, responded this way.

Major or field of study, however, is an even bigger factor in level of anxiety students have about finding a job. Health care majors have the lowest level anxiety related to finding a job. Engineering majors also tend to have low anxiety about finding a job after graduation; 24 percent reported being not at all anxious, the highest of any major. Over half of students in STEM majors (Science/Mathematics, Health Care, and Engineering categories) indicate that they believe finding a job in their field will be somewhat easy or very easy. On the other hand non-STEM majors, especially education, fine arts, and humanities are far less confident. Eighty percent fine arts majors and 83 percent of education majors believe that finding a job will be at least somewhat difficult.

**Respondents generally feel prepared for their careers by their education.**

A large majority of students, about 71 percent, felt that their education has prepared them at least somewhat well for their intended career. Only five percent of students felt somewhat poorly or very poorly prepared by their studies. Over 80 percent of education majors responded that their education has prepared them very well or somewhat well for their careers. Large proportions of humanities and business majors also felt at least somewhat well prepared. On the other hand, engineering majors were less positive, with only 19 percent feeling that their education prepared them very well, and eight percent of engineering students indicated that their education prepared them somewhat poorly or very poorly. Students in technology and trades programs were the most likely to feel that their education prepared them poorly (14 percent).

**Forty percent of all students do not plan to stay in Northeastern Pennsylvania to seek employment after graduation. Another third are not sure if they will do so.**

Furthermore, nearly half of undergraduate seniors do not plan to seek employment in Northeastern Pennsylvania after graduation. The relatively small share (27 percent) of all respondents planning to

stay locally after college or graduate school may indicate a problematic “brain drain” in which educated and talented young adults seek opportunities elsewhere. It may also indicate the relative strength of the region’s higher education institutions if students are coming to the area to receive their education without the intention of relocating here permanently. However, nearly a quarter of students with home zip codes in Lackawanna and Luzerne counties still don’t plan on seeking employment in the region, and about a third are unsure if they will do so. This suggests that many students who were born and raised in Northeastern Pennsylvania are exploring opportunities outside of the area. Regardless, it is important to make an effort to make the region an attractive place for young college graduates to live and work, especially given the large share of all respondents (33 percent) that reported being unsure if they will stay in the region to look for a job after graduation.

This pattern does not vary highly among different majors or fields of study, with two exceptions: students studying education and students studying technology and trades. These are the only majors in which students are more likely to plan to remain in Northeastern Pennsylvania than to plan on leaving to seek employment.

Students’ reasons for planning to leave Northeastern Pennsylvania are frequently economic in nature. Many respondents plan to leave the area in search of more job opportunities and higher salaries. Numerous respondents cited a lack of job opportunities in their chosen field, a lack of jobs in general, and low salaries as reasons to seek employment elsewhere. Others plan to leave to return to their hometowns.



*"The report underscores the breadth and depth of talented young people who are enrolled at the region's higher education institutions. We encourage efforts to learn from this listening exercise by strengthening regional experiential learning, graduate education and employment opportunities for our students and graduates." Kevin P. Quinn, S.J., President, The University of Scranton.*

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