



YOUTH & EMPLOYMENT

TODAY'S STUDENTS
TOMORROW'S WORKFORCE

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

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Whether the economy is stable or in flux, whether unemployment is falling or rising, the US economy depends on the talent of its workforce. In fact, the quality of the workforce is a key to productivity and profitability.

As a result, there has been widespread interest in employees across the generations. Numerous books and articles have been written about hiring, managing, and retaining Gen-Xers, Baby Boomers, and Matures, and there are whole industries and fields devoted to workforce preparation and development. Despite this interest, we know very little about the work experiences and views of **today's youth—tomorrow's workforce**.



Families and Work Institute (FWI) has long believed that it is important to listen to young people themselves. A key lesson from FWI's Ask The Children® survey series is that what adults think that young people think and what young people actually think can be quite different. Furthermore, while

the media is beginning to interview young people on their reactions to the news of the day and on issues affecting their generation, these "kids on the street" do not necessarily capture the voices and opinions of the majority of young people, as we have found by conducting studies of nationally representative groups of young people. It is through these rigorous studies that we have learned unexpected new truths and gained important insights.

With funding from JPMorganChase and the Open Society Institute, FWI conducted the *Youth and Employment* study to look at how young people experience the world of work—their current jobs as well as their hopes, aspirations, fears and expectations about tomorrow's jobs.

We used several approaches in this study. First, we reviewed the literature and talked with employers interested in and concerned about young workers and the future workforce. Based on this information, we identified the most important questions to ask youth and developed the study survey. Harris Interactive administered the paper-and-pencil questionnaire to a nationally representative sample of 10th, 11th, and 12th graders in classrooms

around the country from January 21 to February 17, 2000. Overall, 1,028 students completed the survey. Following the completion of data collection, focus groups of students were convened to shed further light on the findings. All "differences" and "relationships" reported here are statistically significant unless otherwise noted. To illustrate these findings, when appropriate, we also present what we heard from the focus groups in students' own words.

FINDINGS

1. Most students are working.

While some might think of the high school years as being primarily devoted to school, this is not the case for the average American teenager. Most are working:

- 78 percent of students have had a paid/unpaid job either during the school year or during the previous summer.

2. There is a gender divide in boys' and girls' work experience.

More than one third of the students—boys and girls alike—work in restaurants and retail stores. Beyond their work in restaurants and retail, however, there is a gender divide in their work experiences:

- Girls are more likely to have jobs considered "women's work;" that is, caring for or teaching others: 30 percent of girls' most recent jobs involved babysitting, child care, elder care, hospital work, health care, tutoring, mentoring, or being a camp counselor, life guard or coach. In contrast, only 7 percent of boys did this kind of work.
- Boys are more likely to have jobs considered "men's work," involving physical labor: 27 percent of boys' most recent jobs involved yard work, farming, fishing, construction, repair, factory work, or non-sales work in retail; only 4 percent of girls did this kind of work.

Although there are no differences between boys' and girls' average hourly pay, girls are more likely to be paid low wages while boys are more likely to be paid high wages:

- Girls (16%) are more likely than boys (7%) to earn less than \$3.00 per hour.
- Boys (29%) are more likely than girls (17%) to earn more than \$7.00 per hour.

3. Many students are saving for the future.

Cultural stereotypes often depict young people as materialistic and greedy, as caught up in the consumer culture. While it is true that almost all young people work for extra spending money (93%), a sizeable number are also putting aside money for their future.

- A majority works because their parents think that it is a good idea for them to have a job (76%).
- A majority is also working to save for college or long-term goals (59%).
- More than one in six (16%) works because their families need the money they earn.

4. Most students expect to earn a four-year college degree.

Eight in ten students in the tenth through the twelfth grades (82%) report that they expect to complete at least a four-year college degree and about one third (32%) expects to obtain a graduate or professional degree as well.

- Girls (85%) are more likely than boys (78%) to say they expect to get a four-year college degree or more.
- In contrast, only 1 percent of students do not expect to finish high school and 7 percent plan to stop with a high school diploma or its equivalent.

Statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau reveal that of the population 25 years and older in the United States, 25 percent have earned a four-year degree (Bachelor's degree) or higher. In addition, a little more than one in five people (21%) do complete some college, without attaining a degree.

Since the four-year college completion rates are much lower than the expectations of this nationally representative sample of students, it will be important for future studies to find out what happens in the intervening years to prevent many students from reaching their goals of educational

achievement or to see if the college completion rates rise for this generation.

5. Students are more interested in meaningful and secure jobs than they are in jobs where they can get rich or succeed quickly.

Students were asked what aspects of jobs will be most important to them in the future.



- The vast majority of students want to find jobs that are personally meaningful to them (84%), to work with people who treat them well (78%), and to have jobs where they can be creative and use their special skills (69%).
- In addition, students want jobs that are secure (82%), provide good benefits (78%), and allow time for personal and family activities (79%).
- Fewer students will look for jobs where they can make a lot of money (58%) or be able to succeed very quickly (49%).

6. There is a gender divide in boys' and girls' expectations of managing work and family life.

Nine in ten students who plan to have a job also plan to have children. There are, however, striking differences in how they expect to manage these two roles:

- Girls (75%) are far more likely than boys (14%) to say they would stop working for a while when they have children.
- Girls (81%) are also more likely than boys (59%) to say they will reduce their work hours when they have children.
- Boys (73%) are also more likely than girls (28%) to expect their spouses to reduce their work hours when they have children.

It is important to note, however, that close to three in five boys (59%) say they expect to reduce their work hours when they have children. Fewer girls than that expect their spouses to reduce their work hours (28%) to care for children.

SKILLS STUDENTS THINK WILL BE VERY IMPORTANT TO THEIR EMPLOYERS

Students who plan to have a paid job

TOTAL (n=1011)	Boys (n=520)	Sig.	Girls (n=491)
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Percentage of students who think that the following skills and commitments will be very important to their future employers...

Being able to get the job done, even if the tasks are not well defined	75%	75%	ns	76%
Being able to work under pressure and meet deadlines	74%	75%	ns	73%
Finding creative ways to do your job better or faster	69%	71%	ns	67%
Being able to work with people who come from different racial and ethnic backgrounds	69%	63%	***	74%
Being able to avoid and resolve conflicts with supervisors and coworkers	67%	64%	*	70%
Upgrading your skills and education	63%	61%	ns	65%
Being comfortable with changes in your job and workplace	59%	56%	*	62%
Putting in extra effort or longer hours to help your employer succeed	57%	57%	ns	57%
Staying at the same job for several years or more	55%	55%	ns	55%
Being able to write well	54%	48%	***	60%
Having good computer skills and knowledge	54%	55%	ns	54%

Note: Only *very important* responses are reported to provide greater discrimination among skill ratings.
Significance: *** $p < .001$; * $p > .05$; ns=not significant

7. When asked about what employers will be looking for in tomorrow's employees, there are some gaps in what they think employers will need and what employers might actually need.

This study reveals that students view adult jobs as quite demanding. Boys and girls alike believe their future employers will look for those who are able to handle ambiguity, work under pressure, find creative solutions to get their work done better and faster, and work with diverse groups.

However, students place less stress on literacy and computer skills than employers might think necessary.

8. When asked in an open-ended question about what employers should know about today's students and tomorrow's workforce, students write against "teen profiling:"

Young people today are optimistic about their potential as future workers and ask adults to give them a chance rather than make assumptions about them based on stereotypes.

Young people are vocal about the strengths and potential of their generation.

Employers need to know that our generation is very capable of doing a lot of things. Many people say we are spoiled, but the truth is we work harder than the generation before us.

- Boy, 15 years

Students also encourage employers and the general public to take them seriously instead of assigning them negative stereotypes.

Employers should learn to get to know us more and not judge us by our looks. Just because we dress and look a certain way doesn't mean we're rude, bad or any of those typical teenager stereotypes.

- Girl, 15 years

Even the most average students can shoot for the moon if the opportunity is presented.

- Boy, 16 years

**SPECIFIC IMPLICATIONS
AND ACTION STEPS**

The implication of this study for employers is:

To create a work environment where employees can grow, learn and prosper, where differences are valued and where employees can be committed to their work and their personal or family lives. This, in turn, can create more hardworking, dedicated employees.

The implications of this study for schools are:

To work with employers to determine the skills and approaches young people will need when they take their place in the world or work and to provide opportunities for this kind of learning; and

To work with students in helping them be prepared for a life of ongoing learning, including learning in higher education and in workplaces.

The implications for parents are:

To be more intentional in sharing their work lives with children in ways that help them learn constructive lessons about the world of work; and

To help their children think about their expectations about managing work and family life.

The implication for the general public and media is:

To give young people more of a chance—to get to know them instead of judging them on appearance and reputation alone.

And finally, the implications for us all are:

To continue to "ask the children"—because their views and their opinions are not always what we think they are—and to craft solutions where young people's voices become part of the solutions to pressing societal issues.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS

1. What should the employers of America know about you and your generation?
2. What do you think about the roles of men and women in the family and the workplace?
3. Were you surprised by any of the findings in this study? Why? Do you think the study captures the thoughts and experiences of your peers?
4. What would you recommend for employers, schools, parents, and the general public to help students be well prepared to go to college? To enter the world of work?
5. In what ways should the jobs that students have in high school prepare them for working?
6. What would you recommend for employers to help you navigate your work and family life in the future? Do you think these should differ for boys and girls? Why or why not?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

1. Were you surprised by any findings in this study? Why? Do you think that the study captures the thoughts and experiences of the students you know?
2. Why do you think more students expect to finish a four-year-degree program than actually do so? What can be done to increase the number of students who graduate from college?
3. What kinds of experiences would be most useful in helping your students think about their future jobs? Would these differ for boys and girls? Why or why not?
4. In what ways can or should schools and employers work together to help young people have positive experiences and expectations?
5. What kinds of experiences should students have to prepare them for their future work and family lives? Would these differ for boys and girls? Why or why not?
6. Why do you think students place less emphasis on writing and computer skills than employers might expect? What would you do to address this?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

1. Were you surprised by any findings in this study? Why? Do you think that the study captures the thoughts and experiences of your children?
2. If your children have jobs, what are they learning from these jobs? What should they be learning? What changes might be necessary for this to happen?
3. Why do you think more students expect to finish a four-year-degree program than actually do so? What can be done to increase the number of students who graduate from college?
4. What kinds of experiences would be most useful in helping your children think about their future jobs? Would these differ for your sons and daughters? Why or why not?
5. In what ways are you intentionally—and not intentionally—sharing the lessons you’ve learned about work? About family life? What impressions are your children getting from you? What impressions do you want to give them? Do these differ for your sons and your daughters? Why or why not?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR EMPLOYERS

1. Were you surprised by any findings in this study? Why? How do you think the findings will affect the way you think about the work and the family lives of your current and future employees?
2. Do you employ teenagers? If so, what do you think these jobs teach young people about the world of work?
3. What implications do you think the findings of this study have on the way you look at and recruit the next generation of workers? Are there different implications for male and female workers?
4. What do you think you as an employer can be doing now to better prepare both tomorrow’s workers and your own business for the future world of work? How should schools and employers work together to achieve these changes?