



PARKER  
DEWEY

2023-2024

# Student Sentiments on Campus Recruiting



# Executive Summary

This spring, Parker Dewey reached out to more than 100,000 students across our nationwide talent network to understand how they prefer to engage with prospective employers. Both early-career talent and recruiters are experiencing the challenges of a volatile labor market. A constant finding in our current and past surveys is the student's need and preference for a real, paid work experience with an organization to explore career opportunities, demonstrate skills, and build authentic relationships with employers to secure the right job after graduation.

95% of respondents rated “real, paid work experience with an organization” as their preferred method of engaging with employers, allowing them to build, develop, and demonstrate their skills. In addition, real work experiences positively influenced their decision to apply and helped them build professional connections.

Students shared valuable insights into when they start their career planning, the goals they hope to accomplish when participating in campus recruiting activities, and their biggest obstacles in the job search process. 77% of college students indicated they started to think about their career plans during their second-year or earlier, and 45% indicated they'd like to explore roles of interest through experiential learning opportunities. The biggest obstacle students identified to getting a job was not having a network of professionals to support them in their search.

To help campus recruiters optimize their strategies, we asked students about their participation and perceived value of popular tactics. 74% spend time looking at job ads, but only for employers they are already familiar with. 53% utilize campus career services and use the guidance to apply to employers they are already familiar with. 50% attend career fairs, and do utilize these events to learn about employers they were not previously considering, but fail to build their network or skills. Meanwhile, 81% of students are interested in Micro-Internships to gain experience, learn about employers, and build their professional network.

As you begin to plan for the next academic year, this report will help your organization better understand how the early-career, high-potential talent you're seeking views your efforts—and how you can best support students in launching their careers.

# 2023 Data Highlights

We surveyed our nationwide network of early-career talent, which includes current students and recent graduates of associates, bachelors, masters, and doctoral degree programs:



## Key Data

**72%** of respondents identify as being part of an **underrepresented** group in the workforce

**46%** expect to graduate in the **next academic year**

**54%** of respondents are first- or second-year students **actively engaged in career planning**

Where they are in their career planning and development process:

**50%** of all respondents are **actively pursuing opportunities**

**77%** started thinking about careers **during their second-year or earlier**

**69%** wish employers had begun to **engage them earlier** than they did

**95%** rated “**real, paid work experience with an organization**” as the **most valuable** way to engage them

**81%** are seeking Micro-Internships to **gain experience, learn about employers, and build professional networks**

**#1** need right now is **more experience to build their resume**

**#1** obstacle in securing a job after graduation is **not having a professional network**

Read the full report for actionable insights to get the most out of your campus recruiting efforts, enhance your talent acquisition strategy, and ensure you’re driving the most return on all of your early-career activities.

# What Students Want

**95%**

rated “**real, paid work experience with an organization**” as the **most valuable** way to engage them

**#1**

reason students participate in campus recruiting activities is to **get experience in roles that interest them**

This survey focuses on what students want, how they learn about career opportunities, and how they perceive various recruiting activities as they align with their job search—but we’d be remiss if we didn’t start by acknowledging the challenges facing recruiters across industries working each day to cut through the noise to attract, engage, and assess early-career talent.

**Regardless of industry, talent acquisition professionals frequently cite three top challenges to hitting their goals and effectively performing their jobs, including:**

- Difficulty reaching diverse talent
- Low bandwidth/lean teams with limited resources
- Limited reach/low candidate awareness

Maybe only one of these challenges hits home for your organization, maybe all three. Maybe you’re filling open early-career roles, but have a gut feeling you’re not getting the greatest return on your efforts. While there’s no one-size-fits-all approach to recruiting, there are many lessons that can be learned, and insights that can be gleaned by going directly to the source: college students actively seeking to launch their careers.

One thing to always remember: emerging talent doesn’t know what they don’t know, and they have limited prior knowledge and experience to base decisions on. You could have an optimized recruiting funnel, with a mix of educational programming, skills development activities, and relationship building—and still find qualified candidates aren’t applying or low first-year retention rates. These challenges often stem back to talent not having the experience **they** needed to choose your organization.





## What Students Want

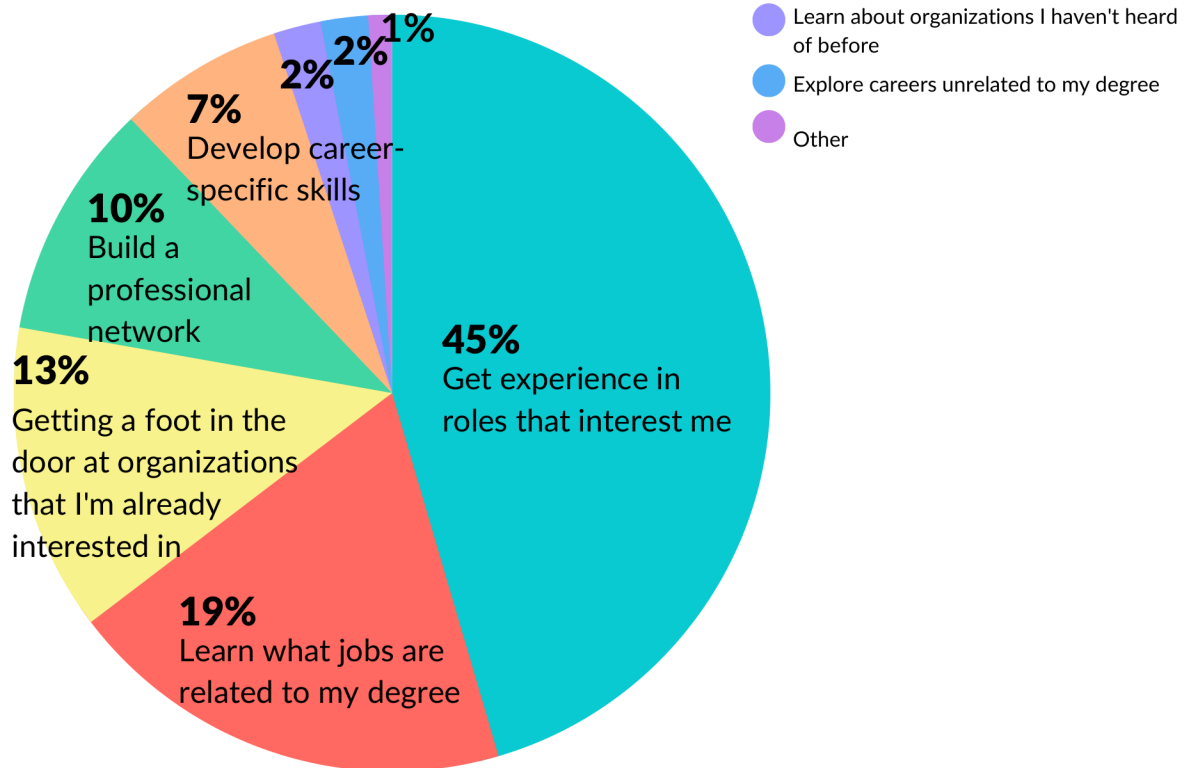
Experiential recruiting introduces the concepts of learning by doing into the recruiting process. By engaging early-career candidates in hands-on experiences, they can better connect theories and knowledge learned in the classroom to real-world situations and professional outcomes. This skills-based hiring approach also ensures you reach students who may otherwise be filtered out during a resume review or an interview.

### When college students participate in experiential recruiting activities, they gain:

- A better understanding of careers, roles, and industries
- Insight into their own skills, interests, passions, and values
- Opportunities to collaborate with diverse organizations and people
- Positive professional practices and skill sets
- Self-confidence and leadership skills

It's no wonder that emerging professionals are eager for meaningful experiences to help them launch their careers. **In fact, the number one reason why college students report attending campus recruiting events is to get experience in roles that interest them.**

### Why Students Participate in Campus Recruiting



While your goals are likely centered around developing a robust and diverse pipeline of candidates, lowering or maintaining cost per hire, and increasing early-career talent conversion, the early-career talent you're seeking is focused on gaining experience. And, with less than 2% actively learning more about organizations they hadn't previously heard of, your job is that much more challenging without a strong employer brand to attract college students and recent graduates.

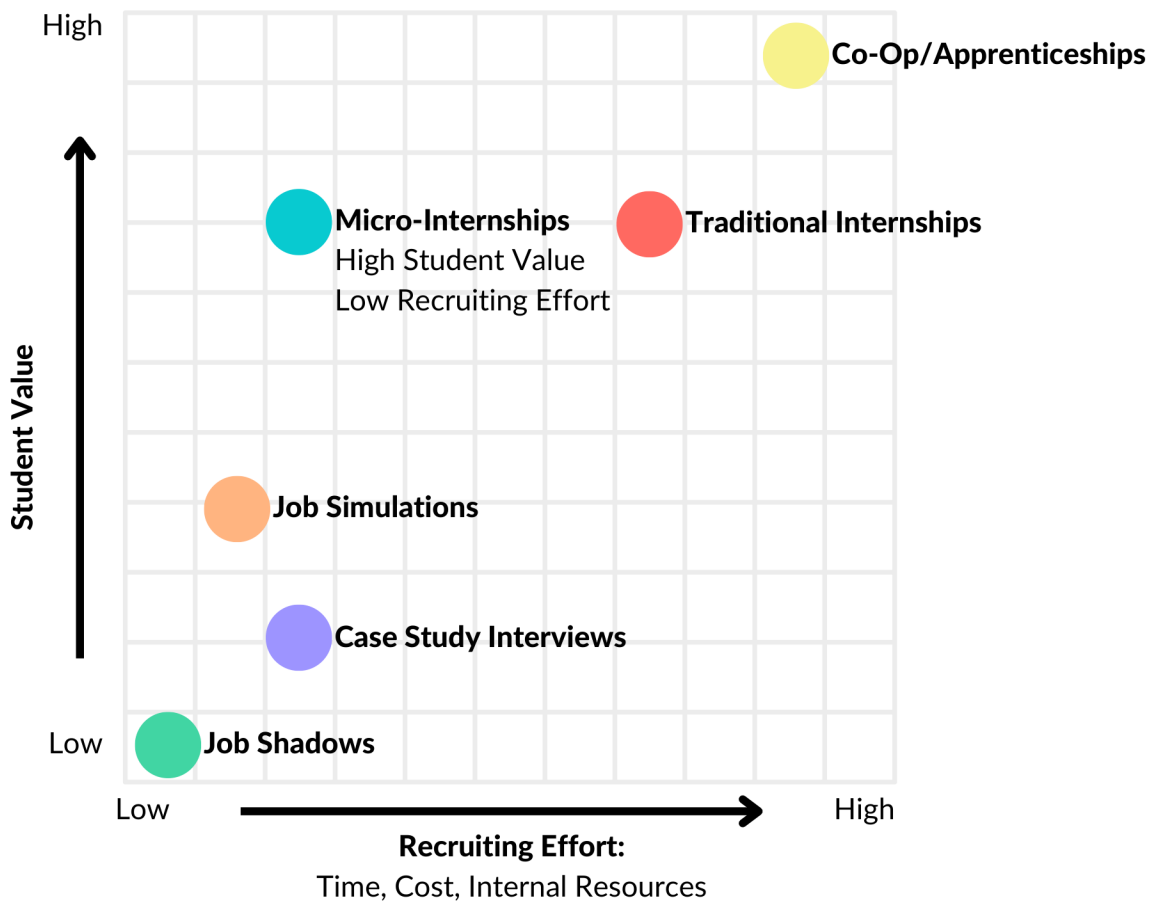
# What Students Want

## How College Students Want To Engage With Employers



While examples of experiential recruiting have been around forever, it's still a new concept for many talent professionals seeking to incorporate innovative marketing strategies into their recruitment efforts. It's also frequently considered one of the more cumbersome and costly strategies—but it doesn't have to be.

## Experiential Recruiting Tactics By Ease of Management and Value to Student



### Taking Action

Early-career hiring is difficult since candidates lack the experiences vital to helping both them and you to determine if the role is the right match. By incorporating low-effort, high-value experiences into your recruiting strategy, you'll reach candidates exactly how they want to engage, while providing the insights needed for both parties to make effective decisions. This drives a more diverse candidate pool and leads to better hiring outcomes for all.

“I would like more opportunities to work with different companies to apply new skills, identify my strengths and weaknesses, and get a feel for company culture.”  
Veteran, Class of 2023 at a top public university



# What Students Need

**#1**

need right now is **more experience** to build their resume

**#1**

obstacle in securing a job after graduation is **not having a professional network**

So why is experience the top goal for today's college students? Beyond exploring career paths, college students recognize that a degree alone is often not enough to land an interview in today's labor market.

Just as recruiters seek to stand out to candidates, students don't want to just play the numbers game with applications. They want to spend time with organizations and roles that align with their skills, values, and goals. **As a result, the number one need college students believe will help them secure a job after graduation is for more experience to build their resumes.**

If you're struggling to reach high-potential candidates, adapt your approach to support and address what students say are their top needs as they transition from classroom to career:

**The top three needs identified by the students we surveyed were:**

1. More **experience** to build my resume
2. More information about job opportunities and **where I can employ my skills**
3. A better understanding of employers and **what the positions they are hiring for will entail**

## Unpacking Skills

Beyond increasing the number of experiential learning opportunities, recruiters and hiring managers should also pay attention to how they describe what skills an ideal candidate should demonstrate in their application.

Many college students rely on hands-on learning to understand how classroom skills apply to professional roles. Inexperienced candidates may not recognize the differences between a business development role's requirement for "excellent communication skills" compared to a junior engineering role's requirement for the same.

By putting students' needs at the forefront of your programming strategy, you'll reach more potential candidates, build your brand, and support recruiting for skills critical to your organization.



## What Students Need

In addition to supporting early-career talent development, recruiters seeking to connect with a wider diversity of candidates should incorporate more relationship building into their strategy. **With more than 50% of survey respondents actively pursuing opportunities, college students report one of their biggest obstacles to securing a job is not having a network.** One respondent succinctly described the issue: “How can I build a professional network if I don’t know any professionals?”

## Taking Action

Like experiential recruiting, networking and relationship building doesn’t have to be heavy. For many students—particularly first-generation college students and those from diverse and underrepresented backgrounds in the workforce—offering more opportunities to simply interact with your existing team can have a profound impact. One idea we’ve seen stand out: connect employee resource groups with Micro-Interns. ERG members benefit from extra support, while early-career candidates see the importance of DEI within your organization.

“Micro-Internships give me the opportunity to build skills and a network that works with my packed schedule.”

First generation college student with a disability,  
Class of 2024 at a private liberal arts college

“Help me to develop my interpersonal skills and also build a network with other industry related professionals.”

Class of 2024 at a large state university

“There’s no reason why any company should not be using Micro-Internships. It is the easiest way to add value to the organization by getting some projects completed, giving students the opportunity to learn, and being cost-effective.”

Alison Keefe, Global Director of Emerging Talent at  
Smith+Nephew

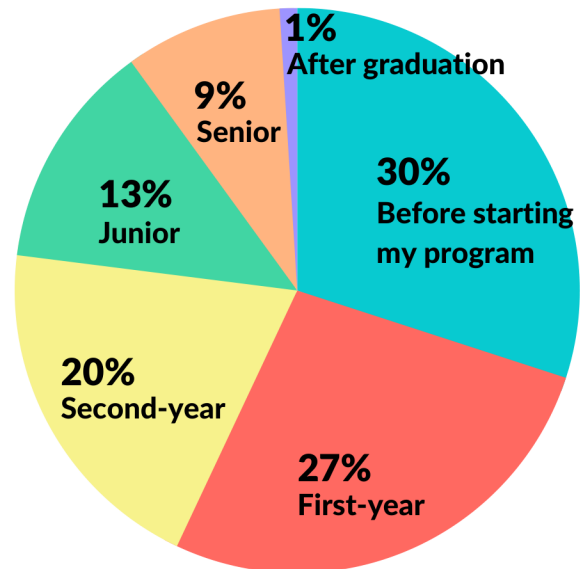
# When to Engage

**77%**

started thinking about career planning and development **during their second-year or earlier**

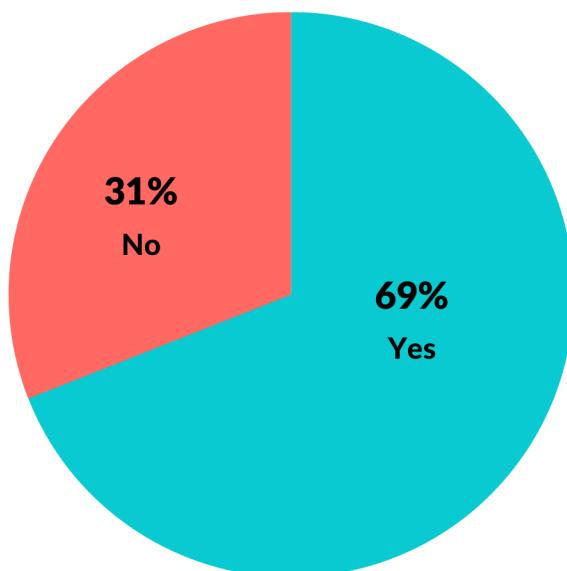
When you've got a lean team or limited bandwidth, targeting your campus recruiting efforts toward students closest to graduation might make sense. But limiting your efforts to upperclassmen can put you behind when it comes to relationship building with high potential candidates.

## When Did Students Start Thinking About Career Plans



Not only do the majority of students surveyed state they are already thinking about career plans prior to their second-year, but a closer look at data from Class of 2023 respondents who anticipate graduating next December shows 80% expected to hear from employers earlier than they did, or reported they still haven't!

## Do Students Wish Employers Had Begun to Engage Earlier?



"Sophomore year is the perfect year to interact with possible employers to explore future opportunities in the pursuit of my career."  
Student from underrepresented background, Class of 2024 at a community college

# What Students Participate In And Perceived Value

As you sort through data and plan your early-career recruiting strategy, keep your audience top of mind! We asked college students which campus recruiting activities they participated in during the 2022-2023 academic year, and what value they took away from the activity towards helping them achieve their career goals.

## Top 5 Recruiting Activities Students Participated in This Past Year

### Job Ads

**74%** of college students spent time looking at internship and job ads

#### The biggest perceived value they got from this activity:

Job ads increased my awareness of employers I was already interested in.

#### Tips for refining your strategy:



- Clearly define how the skills you're seeking relate to the responsibilities of the role since many majors don't sound like job titles!
- Offer short-term, low-risk experiences for students to apply their existing skills and learn new ones to build your talent pipeline.

### Career Services

**53%** of college students utilized campus career services and advising

#### The biggest perceived value they got from this activity:

Career services positively influenced my decision to apply to employers I was already considering.

#### Tips for refining your strategy:



- Partner with career services to support students who have the skills, but lack confidence and connections.
- Think smaller: reach diverse candidates by offering abbreviated versions of your current programs to increase accessibility.

## What Students Participate In And Perceived Value


### Career Fairs

**50%** of college students attended a career fair

#### The biggest perceived value they got from this activity:

Career fairs increased my awareness of employers I was not previously considering.

#### Tips for refining your strategy:

- 
- Offer Micro-Internships in advance of the career fair to drive day-of traffic, or even as an exclusive opportunity open to those that stop by
  - Bring a “buddy” to have existing team members available for informal chats with students to support relationship building.


### Networking

**35%** of college students participated in networking events with alumni and other professionals

#### The biggest perceived value they got from this activity:

Networking events helped me build professional connections.

#### Tips for refining your strategy:

- 
- Access to these events was the biggest challenge for students. Test technology, flexible scheduling, and even time-of-day to increase participation.
  - Set managers and team “volunteers” up for success by providing them with Micro-Internships to work with students—they’ll value a new perspective and lend their time to your recruiting efforts.


### Info Sessions

**31%** of college students took part in employer info sessions

#### The biggest perceived value they got from this activity:

Info sessions increased my awareness of employers I was already interested in.

#### Tips for refining your strategy:

- 
- Recognize that these events rely on some existing knowledge of your employer brand and are unlikely to attract first- or second-year students seeking to explore careers.
  - Combine info with hands-on experiences such as offering an opportunity to work on a Micro-Internship open only to attendees.



## What Students Participate In And Perceived Value

### Additional Ways Students Want to Connect With Employers

Though these additional activities had both some participation and some perceived value by college students, ***you may want to take a closer look at your return on investment***, candidate metrics such as diversity and retention from these tactics, and hiring manager feedback on candidate quality from these activities.

## Employer Career Sites

**28%** of college students surfed employer websites

### The biggest perceived value they got from this activity:

Career sites increased my awareness of employers I was already interested in.

### Tips for refining your strategy:

- Ensure your opportunities are being found where students already are; they're unlikely to be proactively searching for you on their own.
- Students want to "try on" careers, industries, and employers before they commit for the long-term.



## Employer Resume Review Sessions

**21%** of college students sought feedback at resume review sessions

### The biggest perceived value they got from this activity:

Resume review sessions positively influenced my decision to apply.

### Tips for refining your strategy:

- In last year's report, 70% of students had participated, and we see the interest level is still there. This is a low-cost way to support university partners, begin relationships with students, and ensure they apply.
- Confidence is key, and students highly value getting the "insider info" on what their resume should include directly from you and your team.



## Videos

**54%** of college students shared that videos of past and current employees **were not an engaging learning tool**

### Tips for refining your strategy:

In the age of TikTok, YouTube, and Reels, we were surprised by the result! Consider where your current and future videos can be found, and ensure they're on your social media platforms and not solely on your website.

## Virtual Job Simulations

**35%** of college students shared that virtual work experiences **were not an engaging learning tool**

### Tips for refining your strategy:

- Know your audience and their needs: virtual simulations fail to deliver on the wants and needs of students actively launching their careers. Simulations don't provide professional connection students are seeking, and as an unpaid work experience they are inaccessible to many diverse candidates.



## What Students Participate In And Perceived Value

### Recruiting Activities By Perceived Value

	Awareness of Employers	Skills Development	Relationship Building	Influence on Application
Micro-Internships	✓	✓	✓	✓
Resume Review Sessions				✓
Networking With Professionals	✓		✓	✓
Career Fairs	✓			✓
Employer Websites				✓
Career Services				✓
Job Ads	✓			✓
Info Sessions	✓			✓
Virtual Job Simulations	✓			
In-Class Projects For An Employer	✓	✓		

This table shows a summarized view of students' understanding and value of specific activities in relation to recruiting outcomes, where 50% or more of participating students identified benefits.

## Taking Action

For early-career candidates, most recruiting activities generate awareness and directly impact their decision to apply. However, to truly build relationships, you should support students in developing career-ready skills and provide opportunities for activities that incorporate opportunities to connect with professionals on your team.

“A job might sound exciting (or boring) on paper, but once I start working, I may realize the opposite is true. I like that Micro-Internships allow me to experience the role without the commitment of a job offer”  
 Student from diverse background, Class of 2025 at a public college

# So What About Micro-Internships?

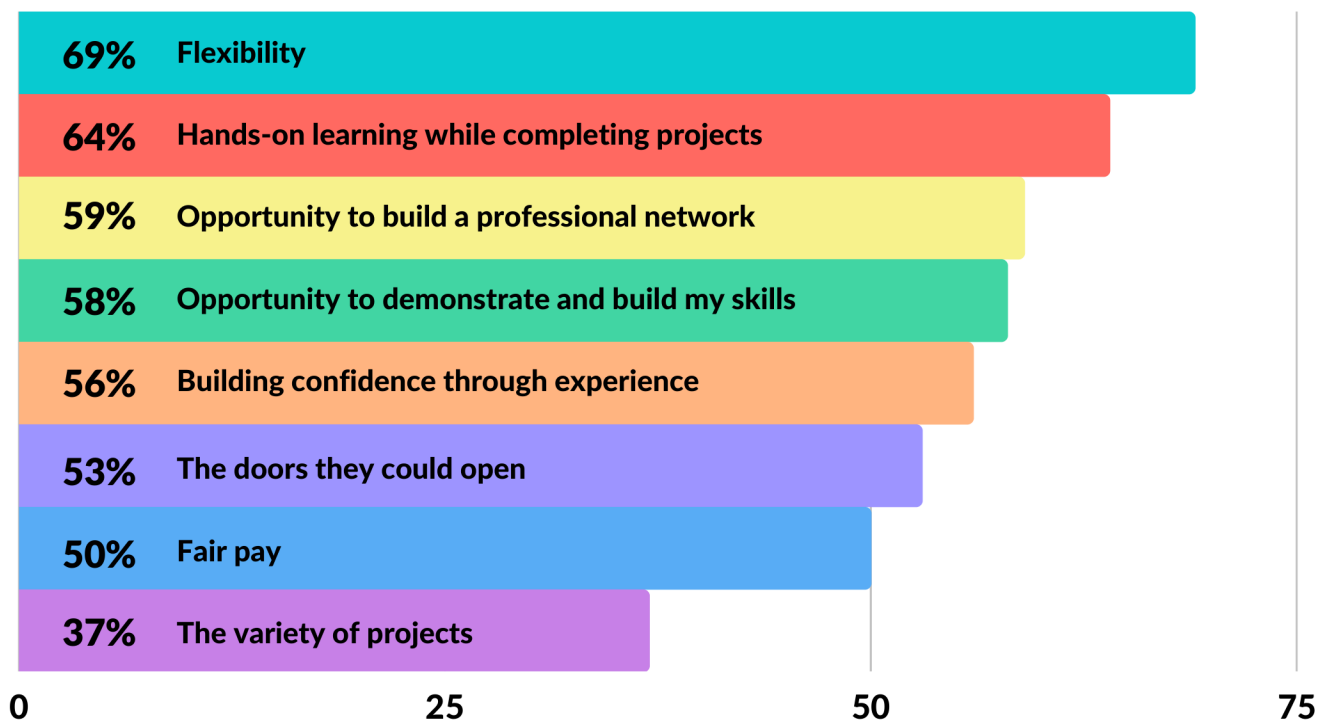
**81%** of students are interested in Micro-Internships as an activity to gain experience, learn about employers, and build their professional network

## The biggest perceived value they got from this activity:

Micro-Internships helped me build, develop, or demonstrate my skills

When you consider the wants, needs, and goals of early-career talent, it's not surprising that Micro-Internships—short-term, paid, professional opportunities—are of high interest.

## Why College Students Are Seeking Micro-Internships



What may surprise you is just how easy it is to integrate Micro-Internships into your existing recruiting strategy! Parker Dewey supports employers across industries to not only overcome common challenges like engaging diverse talent, increasing experiential opportunities without adding internal resources, and building candidate awareness, but also drive demonstrable ROI with between 40-80% lower costs per hire and improved hiring outcomes.



## So What About Micro-Internships?

# Refining your campus recruiting strategy with Micro-Internships

If you're struggling to reach diverse talent, Micro-Internships provide a short-term, low-risk opportunity for candidates to gain experience, demonstrate and apply skills, and explore industries. Unlike similar models, all Micro-Internships on Parker Dewey are paid, ensuring equitable access regardless of background or circumstances. As a result, more than 80% of Micro-Interns hired on Parker Dewey come from underrepresented backgrounds.

“I really appreciate the opportunity for paid Micro-Internships. I work full-time and have limited flexibility in pursuing internships that can help me build and develop skills. With Parker Dewey, I can dedicate a few hours a week to the project, learn from the team, and gain valuable skills and insight into the industry without compromising the time I'm already spending at work and school. The flexibility these opportunities offer, where you can work remotely, have measurable outcomes of the project, and a set timeline, all help me gain skills and also make me excited to pursue new opportunities.”

Student from underrepresented background, Class of 2024 at a private research university



## So What About Micro-Internships?

**If hiring managers are breathing down your neck, or complaining about candidate quality,** Micro-Internships enable managers to assess candidates directly on the skills needed to thrive within your organization, while also providing on-demand support for busy teams that need help now. According to McKinsey & Company, skills-based hiring is five times more predictive of job performance, and insights directly from hiring manager feedback enable you to more effectively screen and route candidates for future opportunities.

“Micro-Internships offer the opportunity to apply new skills, identify strengths and weaknesses, network with people from different organizations—and be compensated for my time and effort.”

Veteran, Class of 2023 at a public land-grant university



**If you're spending time on campus but still struggling to drive applications,** Micro-Internships support student needs, allowing them to “test drive” opportunities, build relationships, and gain the confidence they need to apply. By supporting professional development and career exploration, you set your organization apart as one where early-career professionals can grow and thrive.

“Recruiters should be aware that students are looking for meaningful, paid work experiences that will help them develop the skills and experiences they need to succeed in their careers. Providing Micro-Internships demonstrates their commitment to supporting the next generation of workers.”

Student from underrepresented background, Class of 2025 at a public research university



# Final Thoughts

Early-career talent by definition lacks meaningful experience that more tenured professionals use to make career decisions. By incorporating low-effort, high-value experiences into your recruiting strategy, you'll reach candidates exactly how they want to engage, begin building relationships, and drive a more diverse candidate pool by providing a more varied mix of opportunities.

**Combining the value of experiential recruiting with skills-based hiring doesn't need to be heavy or complicated.** Parker Dewey's Micro-Internship programs provide the experience candidates seek, harness the benefits of skills-based hiring, and are tailored to your organization's goals with dedicated support, example project libraries, resources to get managers started, and actionable data to drive your recruiting strategy forward.

## About Parker Dewey

Founded in 2015, Parker Dewey's mission is to solve the transition from college to career. Through its Micro-Internship platform, Parker Dewey offers the largest nationwide network of highly motivated college students and recent graduates who are excited to complete short-term, paid, professional assignments. For organizations, Micro-Internships allow them to more effectively access, engage, and assess potential candidates skills for internships and full-time roles, resulting in improved hiring, diversity, and retention outcomes—without travel costs or new software implementations.

