



PARKER DEWEY

STUDENT SENTIMENTS ON CAMPUS RECRUITING

Insights from students for the
2024-2025 campus recruiting cycle

How can employers effectively reach and recruit college students?

This spring, Parker Dewey reached out to more than 100,000 college students across our nationwide talent network to find out.

In 2024, students highlighted the importance of real, paid work experiences, hands-on role clarity, and chances to build professional networks. Yet, many voiced dissatisfaction with traditional application and interview methods, feeling these processes didn't allow them to fully showcase their abilities. This led to increased anxiety and diminished confidence among students starting their careers.

For employers, this report highlights critical areas for improvement, including:

- Early talent identification
- Employer brand awareness
- Flexible recruitment practices
- Fair compensation

To help you understand and address these challenges, this report is broken down into five key insights from college students and actionable strategies for you to put into play.

Top takeaways

- 1 Freshman and sophomore years are crucial times for employers to engage college students, yet many report a lack of early career exploration opportunities.
- 2 Students are eager to learn about unfamiliar career paths and companies, but feel hindered by current recruiting processes.
- 3 Students want to demonstrate their full range of skills throughout the recruitment process.
- 4 Students are more likely to apply to and accept a role when they experience real work with a company firsthand.
- 5 Flexibility and fair pay are a strategic imperative for attracting college students to your organization.

Who are today's college students?

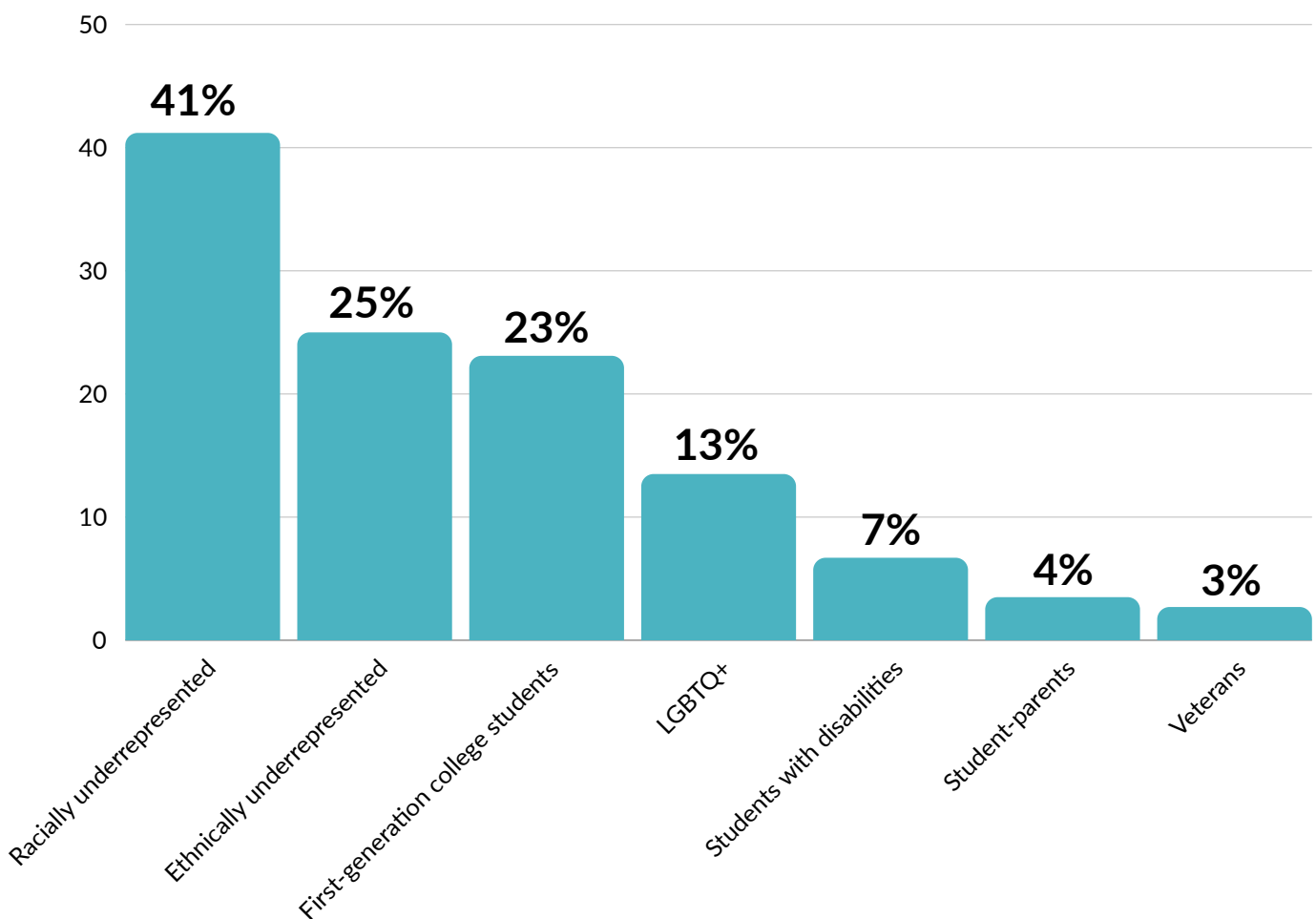
We surveyed our nationwide network of early-career talent, encompassing current students and recent graduates from associate, bachelor, master, and doctoral degree programs.

Expected graduation: 25% of respondents expect to graduate in the next academic year (2024-2025).

Engagement in career planning: 23% of respondents are first- or second-year students actively engaged in career planning.

Identification with underrepresented groups: 59% of respondents identify as being part of one or more underrepresented groups in the workforce.

Demographic breakdown:



Other identifications: Respondents also include individuals who are undocumented, have a conviction history, or are non-traditional students outside of the 18-22 age bracket.

Data highlights

ENGAGEMENT IN CAREER PLANNING

64% began considering career options by their sophomore year or earlier

HOW TO REACH STUDENTS

How students want to engage with employers during their career exploration

95% of students want to:

- learn about employers through real, paid experience with an organization
- understand job responsibilities through hands-on opportunities
- network by doing real work with professionals

SHOWCASING SKILLS

29% believe that the traditional recruiting process allows them to fully showcase their skills

25% believe a resume adequately conveys their skills

16% believe a cover letter adequately conveys their skills

30% believe an interview adequately conveys their skills

TOP BARRIERS

What forces students to pass over opportunities?

Role has on-site requirements **51%**

Role is unpaid or has low pay **49%**

Role has strict availability requirements **45%**

INDUSTRY EXPLORATION

75% of students want to explore careers unrelated to their degree, but **lack clear starting points for learning about unfamiliar roles, companies, and industries** in their career planning

ACCEPTANCE FACTORS

What motivates students to accept a role?

71%
Employer respects student's time in hiring process

70%
Works with their existing schedule

67%
Future growth opportunity

1

STRATEGY

Freshman and sophomore years are crucial times for engaging college students, yet many report a lack of early career exploration opportunities.



of students reported that they began considering future career plans by sophomore year.

Student insight

"I'm concerned that just because I am a first-year student, companies will automatically disregard me."
- Student, Colorado State

Many students noted that they felt like career exploration options were not available to them until junior or senior year.

"As a sophomore and freshman, it was, 'You don't have enough experience. We don't want or recruit your class.' The rhetoric for younger classes is often to just network and get experience, then hope you get an internship your junior year to get a full-time job the next year. I feel it's limiting my chances to gain experience." - Ellie, University of North Carolina Greensboro

EMPLOYER ACTION PLAN: IDENTIFY TALENT EARLY

Engage freshman and sophomore students earlier in their college careers and introduce them to career paths they might not otherwise consider.

- ✓ **Access and nurture earlier:** Engage freshmen and sophomore students with offering Micro-Internships that promote skill development and growth.
- ✓ **Build long-term relationships:** Identify and maintain contact with promising students from early in their college careers, ensuring a pipeline of familiar candidates ready for future roles.
- ✓ **Reduce time-to-hire:** Instead of starting the search when an internship or full-time position becomes vacant, employers can tap into their pool of pre-identified candidates, significantly reducing the time it takes to fill critical roles.



[Get help building an early talent identification strategy.](#)

Students are eager to learn about unfamiliar career paths and companies, but feel hindered by current recruiting processes.



75% of students reported that they want to explore careers unrelated to their degree, but lack clear starting points for learning about unfamiliar roles, companies, and industries in their career planning

MOST LIKELY TO APPLY TO ROLES IN:

1. Tech
2. Education
3. Healthcare

LEAST LIKELY TO APPLY TO ROLES IN:

1. Agriculture
2. Hospitality
3. Manufacturing

Employers hold the key to transforming student perceptions about career opportunities.

"I've learned that I should be more open to exploring new career paths. As a molecular biology major, I had never thought about user experience research before, and now I realize it's a potential career path for me. You go into a project expecting to find one thing, but you might end up going in a different direction." - Chinaemelum

EMPLOYER ACTION PLAN: BOOST YOUR BRAND ON CAMPUS

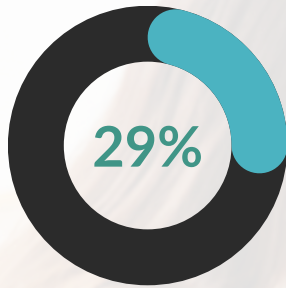
Grow employer brand presence by provide hands-on exposure to students.

- ✓ **Showcase a variety of roles:** Offer projects from a diverse set of departments to expose students to the breadth of options. For example, highlight corporate roles in healthcare, like IT, marketing, and finance, to help them understand the opportunities available within the healthcare industry beyond clinical positions.
- ✓ **Connect with liberal arts or non-traditional majors:** Open your Micro-Internships to majors that don't traditionally align with certain industries. For example, promote roles in financial services to liberal arts students who can offer strong analytical and communication skills.
- ✓ **Expand reach beyond target schools:** Use Parker Dewey to access a broader network of schools, helping you engage with students who are unfamiliar with the opportunities your company offers.



[Get help amplifying your employer brand](#)

Students want to demonstrate their full range of skills in the recruitment process.



feel that the typical recruiting process allows them to showcase their full range of skills and aptitudes.

Do traditional methods help showcase skills?

16%

believe that an **interview** adequately illustrates their skills

25%

believe that a **resume** adequately illustrates their skills

30%

believe that a **cover letter** adequately illustrates their skills

Employer insight

For early-career candidates with limited experience, traditional methods such as resumes, cover letters, and interviews do not effectively capture potential.

Luckily, employers are beginning to consider factors like **core skills** and **growth potential** over more traditional measurements, like **GPA**. According to NACE, only 37% of employers were still weighing GPA as an important screening factor, down from 73% in 2019.

EMPLOYER ACTION PLAN: INTEGRATE SKILLS-BASED HIRING

Incorporate skills-based hiring into your campus recruiting strategy by offering Micro-Internships as part of your hiring process.

- ✓ **Leverage hiring managers:** Engage them to delegate small, professional tasks to college students. This not only helps offload their workload, but also provides a practical way to assess skills.
- ✓ **Offer entry-level role auditions:** Include a practical task component for multiple candidates applying for entry-level roles. This “audition” method allows for an early and assessment of fit for both parties.
- ✓ **Focus on skills:** Use Micro-Internships to evaluate essential core skills not found in resumes or interviews, like communication, problem-solving, and grit.



[Get help implementing skills-based hiring](#)

How can employers effectively reach college students?

College students are clear about what they value in the recruitment process: They seek meaningful opportunities that not only align with their career goals, but also contribute to their professional development. Micro-Internships meet these preferences.

TOP PRIORITIES FOR STUDENTS IN THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

95.3%

Real, paid work experience with an organization

95.2%

Understanding a role through hands-on learning

94.6%

Building my professional portfolio and network

TOP REASONS STUDENTS PURSUE MICRO-INTERNSHIPS

1

Flexibility: Micro-Internships are designed to work with busy schedules, allowing students to work around classes, sports practices, clubs, familial duties, or academic breaks.

2

Confidence building: Students apply their classroom knowledge in practical scenarios, building their skills as they see their impact.

3

Skill demonstration and development: Micro-Internships create an opportunity for students to learn new skills and build upon existing ones in a professional setting.

College students are more likely to apply to and accept a role when they experience real work with a company firsthand.

What they need to know before applying:

1. Skills needed to perform in role
2. Salary range and benefit options
3. Clear role responsibilities
4. Future career growth opportunities available

Students are most likely to accept a role when the recruiting process is structured so they:

1. Feel their **time is valued** throughout the process
2. Have the **flexibility** to gain experience without compromising academic commitments
3. Understand future opportunities for **growth and developing skills**
4. **Build a relationship** with a hiring manager
5. Have prior **direct work experience** with the company

CREATING REAL CONNECTIONS, REMOTELY

While students value in-person connections for building authentic relationships, the on-site nature of traditional recruiting events and the impersonal atmosphere of virtual career fairs can limit meaningful engagement.

Micro-Internships bridge the gap by creating meaningful, personal connections regardless of location, combining the best of both worlds for students.

EMPLOYER ACTION PLAN: BUILD IN EXPERIENTIAL RECRUITING

Give students an immersive understanding of your company with a real project. This approach focuses on engaging students through direct involvement in experiences that reflect actual job conditions, culture, and expectations.

- ✓ **Develop hands-on projects:** Design short-term work opportunities that allow students to engage in work that reflects the real-life tasks they complete in an entry-level role.
- ✓ **Showcase organizational culture:** Expose students to your company's culture and people. This insight helps them visualize their fit within the team and the company environment.
- ✓ **Facilitate relationship building:** Encourage interaction between students and potential team members during their project. These relationships help students gain mentors who can guide their career development.



[Get help building your experiential recruiting strategy.](#)

5

Flexibility and fair pay are a strategic imperative for attracting students to your organization.

TOP BARRIERS TO APPLYING

51%

Role has on-site requirements

49%

Role is unpaid or underpaid

45%

Role has strict availability requirements

"I refuse to be unpaid. I just feel like I should be valued higher than that. Any place that's not going to pay me was not a place I could see a future with." - Keion, Florida State University

CREATING PATHWAYS FOR NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS

A career fair alternative

Programs supporting workforce development, like [Amazon Career Choice](#) and [Salesforce Experience Builder Micro-Internships](#), connect employers with non-traditional candidates who are ready to put their training to work through real-world projects.

By focusing on skills-based achievements rather than traditional credentials, these programs help level the playing field and open doors to promising career paths that might otherwise be inaccessible.

EMPLOYER ACTION PLAN: PRIORITIZE DEI EFFORTS

Leverage Micro-Internships to overcome flexibility and compensation barriers faced by college students. This approach is strategically designed to align with DEI objectives, offering equitable access to professional opportunities and attracting a diverse college talent pool.

- ✔ **Mobilize ERG members:** [Engage ERG members to mentor and connect with Micro-Interns from similar backgrounds, enhancing their experience and support.](#)
- ✔ **Find time outside of summer:** Engage student-athletes and other students with demanding schedules during 2-week winter breaks, offering them tailored short-term projects that fit their packed schedules.
- ✔ **Ensure equal access:** Use Micro-Internships to connect with students from remote or underserved areas, helping them gain access to experience that might not be available to them locally.



[Get help amplifying your DEI strategy.](#)

Final thoughts

By definition, early-career talent lacks meaningful experience that more tenured professionals use to make career decisions. By incorporating low-risk, 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 templates, resources to get managers started, and actionable data to drive your recruiting strategy forward.

"It's about finding that right culture and the right fit that extends beyond the superficial layer. Companies need to really engage potential hires in a way that showcases their true environment and values. This goes much deeper than what one can simply read or discover at a career fair. It's about an authentic representation of the workplace." - Nyauni, Valencia College

About Parker Dewey

Since 2015, Parker Dewey has been at the forefront of connecting companies with the next generation of talent through short-term, professional assignments: Micro-Internships. Our platform offers a nationwide network that helps companies tap into a diverse pool of college students and recent graduates, providing them with real-world work experiences. We're not just filling positions; we're building bridges between education and employment, one project at a time.

Learn more at parkerdewey.com.