

Plans of the Class of 2009

Findings from the 2009 College Senior Survey

PLANS AFTER COLLEGE

In 2009, the CIRP College Senior Survey (CSS) asked 27,611 graduating seniors at 111 colleges and universities about their plans for the future. The figure below shows some of the activities in which these students planned to be involved during the fall of 2009. The two most frequently-cited fall plans were working full-time (62%) and attending graduate or professional school (27%). Other activities that a good number of seniors planned to do in the upcoming fall included traveling (19%), doing volunteer work (18%), working part-time (16%) and/or being involved in a community service organization (9%).

Students could indicate that they planned on doing one or more of the activities listed above. While most 2009 seniors planned to either work (55%) or attend graduate school (20%) in the fall, some students intended to do both—approximately 7% of graduating seniors

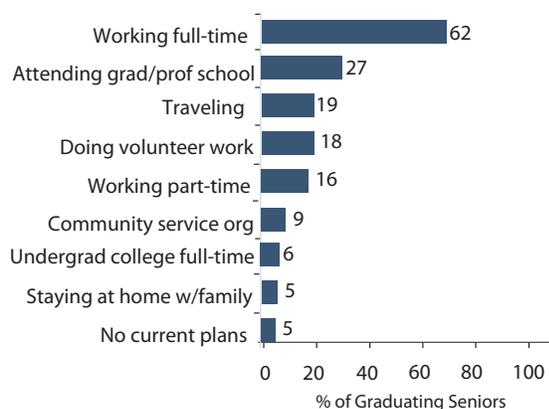
anticipated being employed full-time and attending graduate or professional school in the fall of 2009. This represented 12% of the students planning on full-time work in the fall and 27% of the students on their way to graduate school. Another 25% of the students on their way to graduate school indicated plans to work part-time. In total, more than half of the students going to graduate school in the fall anticipated working at least part-time while enrolled (52%).

STUDENT LOAN DEBT, WORK AND GRADUATE SCHOOL

The 2009 CSS asked students to indicate the total amount of money that they had borrowed to pay for college expenses. Approximately 41% of students reported that they borrowed no money, 21% that they borrowed less than \$20,000, 18% that they borrowed between \$20,000 and \$39,999, and 18% that they had borrowed \$40,000 or more. Students' fall plans seemed to be related to their loan amounts. Specifically, as the amount of debt that students had to repay increased, so did the likelihood that they would enter the workforce full-time directly after college. Just over half of students who reported no loan debt anticipated working full-time in the fall of 2009 (56%), compared to almost two-thirds of students with debt of \$1 to \$19,999 (63%), over two-thirds of students with \$20,000 to \$39,999 of debt (67%), and a full 70% of those with the largest debt (\$40,000 or more).

Interestingly, as loan burden increased, the proportion of students indicating plans for graduate school in the fall immediately after graduation did not decrease—among all groups, approximately 27% reported plans for graduate school in fall 2009. However, as loan debt increased, the proportion of students indicating plans to attend graduate school without working (either full-time or part-time) decreased dramatically.

Plans for Fall 2009



*Note: percentages do not total 100% because respondents could mark all that applied

Graduate School and Work Plans for Fall, by Loan Debt (percentages)

Amount of Money Owed (from loans for college expenses)	Among All Students		Among Students Planning Graduate School		
	Plans for Grad. School	Plans for Grad. School w/no Work	No Plans for Work	Plans for Part-time Work	Plans for Full-time Work
\$0	27	16	58	22	20
<\$20,000	27	12	44	27	29
\$20,000-\$39,999	27	11	42	24	34
\$40,000 +	26	10	37	27	37

Indeed, in 2007 almost half of job-seeking students had received an offer by the time they took the CSS (48%), while in 2009 over half were still looking (52%).

The 2009 seniors anticipating graduate school in the fall showed fewer differences in the status of their plans as compared to the 2007 class, but there were some small indications that even graduate school applicants may have been impacted by the state

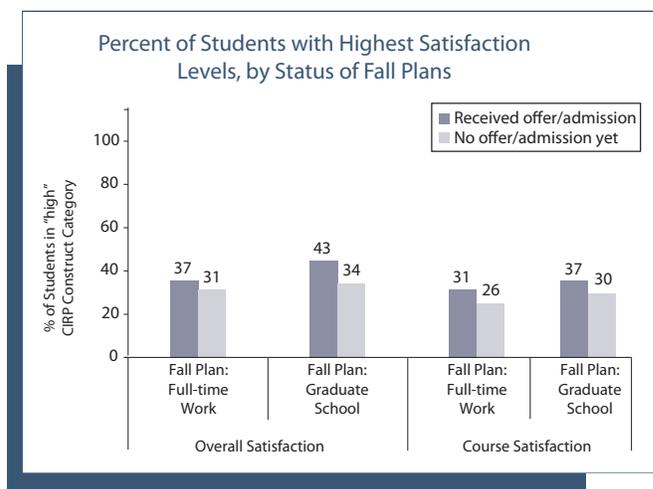
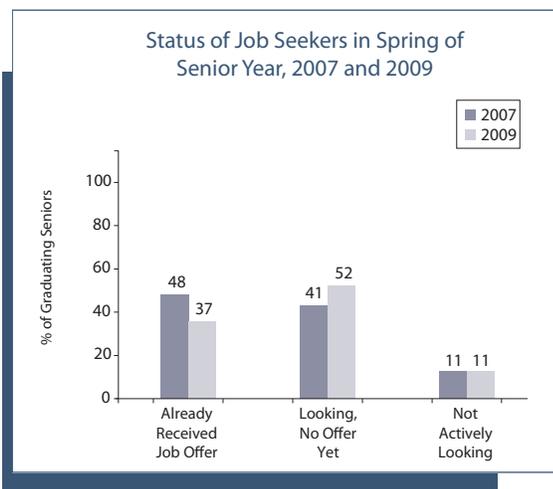
of the economy. In 2007, 57% of the students on their way to graduate school had already applied and had accepted an offer of admission; in 2009 this number dropped to 53%. The four percentage point difference was due both to the larger proportion of students in 2009 versus 2007 who had applied but not been accepted (22% vs. 18%, respectively) as well as to the larger number of students who had not yet applied (24% vs. 22%). Approximately 2% of students from both years reported deferring an admission to school.

As the table above shows, almost 16% of students who carried no loans planned to attend graduate school and not work in the fall, compared to fewer than 10% of those who owed \$40,000 or more. Among the students who anticipated attending graduate school in the fall, over half of those that owed no money had no plans to work (58%), compared to only 37% of those who owed \$40,000 or more. Almost all of the difference in working plans among graduate school-goers with different debt loads was accounted for by differences in the proportion of students who planned to work full-time while in school. About 20% of graduate school attendees with no loans to repay anticipated working full-time while attending graduate school, compared to 37% of those with the largest amounts to repay.

JOB OFFERS AND GRADUATE SCHOOL ACCEPTANCES

2009 was a tough year for the U.S. economy, and many graduating seniors doubtlessly felt this during their job search. Compared to students taking the CSS just two years previously (i.e., the class of 2007), a lower proportion of 2009 seniors with plans to work full-time in the fall reported having received a job offer, and a larger proportion reported that they were looking for jobs but had not received any offers yet (see figure below).

Perhaps reflecting discontent related to the job search or graduate school application status, students whose fall plans were more successfully progressing (i.e. those who had been accepted to graduate school or who had been offered a job) reported a higher level of satisfaction with both their overall college experience and with their coursework than did students whose fall plans were still up in the air. The proportion of students with the highest levels of satisfaction, as measured by the CIRP Course Satisfaction and Overall Satisfaction Constructs, are shown in the figure below for successful and unsuccessful full-time job seekers and graduate school applications.



Seniors who planned on full-time work in the fall and who had already received a job offer were more likely to be highly satisfied than were those who were looking but had not yet received an offer, both with college on the whole and with their coursework. Similarly, students who had applied to graduate school and who had been accepted were more often highly satisfied with college and with their coursework than were students who had applied but had not received any acceptances. Interestingly, students who planned on attending graduate school in the fall had overall and course-related satisfaction levels that were higher than their work-bound counterparts, even when the status of their fall plans were similar.

ANTICIPATED CAREER PATHS

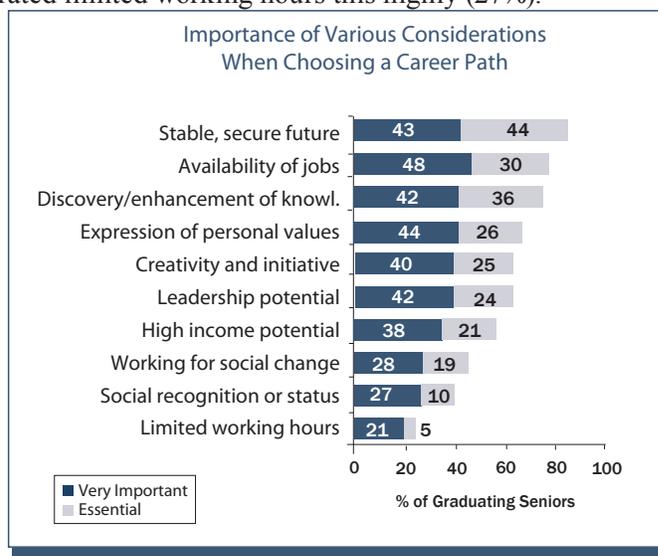
The CSS asked students to report on the lifetime career they expect to pursue. The most common careers that students selected were in elementary or secondary education/administration (10%) and business management/administration (9%). Almost five percent of students aspired to be physicians (5%) or lawyers (5%), and just slightly fewer planned on becoming accountants or actuaries (4%). The remaining most popular careers that students aspired to were engineering (4%) and nursing (3%). Thirteen percent of students indicated that they were undecided about their future career, or did not answer the question.

Many students seem to be choosing their Fall 2009 plans with future career goals in mind, as those students with different career aspirations planned on different activities for the fall immediately after graduation. The table below shows that almost three-quarters of students with career aspirations in business management or administration indicated plans to go straight into full-time work only (74%), while almost as many students with career aspirations in nursing did the same (71%). Over half of students who aspired to be lawyers or physicians planned on attending graduate school immediately with no full-time work (51% and 51%, respectively). Students with aspirations of becoming

a teacher were most likely to anticipate going straight to work without attending graduate school (49%), but a substantial number also reported plans to attend graduate school (17%) or to go to graduate school while working full-time (14%). Over half of the students who planned on careers as engineers anticipated working full-time only in the fall (58%), but many also planned on going immediately to grad school (21% reported plans to attend graduate school only, and 7% reported plans to go to graduate school and work full-time).

CONSIDERATIONS WHEN CHOOSING A CAREER

When choosing a future career, students may take many considerations into account. The CSS asked students to rate the importance of a series of criteria when choosing a career path. As shown in the figure below, the three career characteristics that the most students rated as “very important” or “essential” were having a stable, secure future (86%), the availability of jobs (79%), and the opportunity for the discovery or enhancement of knowledge (77%). On the low end, relatively few students felt that social recognition/status was very important or essential to them (37%), and even fewer rated limited working hours this highly (27%).



Fall Plans, by Probable Future Career

Probable future career	% Reporting Plans for ...			
	Full-time Work	Graduate School	Both Full-time Work and Graduate School	Neither Full-Time Work nor Graduate School
Business	74	8	8	10
Nursing	71	7	8	14
Physician	25	51	2	22
Attorney	29	51	5	14
Teacher	49	17	14	19
Engineer	58	21	7	14

In many cases, the most highly valued job characteristics—the ones that students most often rated “essential”—varied across different career aspirations (see table below), perhaps reflecting some of the motivations that students have for choosing specific careers. For all students, a stable, secure future was the consideration that was most often rated “essential.” After this, aspiring physicians and engineers most frequently cited the discovery or enhancement of knowledge as essential for their future careers (41% and 36% did so, respectively), while among nurses the second-most-often-cited

essential characteristic was availability of jobs (46%). After a stable/secure future, teachers were approximately equally likely to rate as essential both the discovery/enhancement of knowledge (33%) and the availability of jobs (31%).

Among future business executives, the second-most-often-cited essential career consideration was

leadership potential (40%), but almost as many students rated high income potential (37%) and the discovery/enhancement of knowledge (38%) this highly. Aspiring attorneys' and actuaries' top considerations after a stable/secure future were the availability of jobs (31% and 33%, respectively), high income potential (33% and 30%), and the discovery/enhancement of knowledge (35% and 26%).

Among all careers, limited working hours was the consideration least-often rated essential. However, the second-least-often-cited essential characteristic was different across professions. Specifically, very few of the seniors interested in becoming business executives, accountants/actuaries or engineers reported that

Percent of Students Rating Each Concern as "Essential," by Ultimate Career Aspirations

% "essential"	Business	Lawyer	Accountant/ Actuary	Engineer	Physician	Nurse	Teacher
Stable, secure future	54	54	54	45	45	50	39
Discovery/enhancement of knowledge	38	35	26	36	41	32	32
Availability of jobs	34	31	33	27	27	46	31
Leadership potential	40	32	24	24	22	19	19
High income potential	37	33	30	23	18	22	8
Expression of personal values	23	27	16	14	24	24	28
Creativity and initiative	24	18	12	19	16	14	26
Working for social change	9	27	6	6	20	15	26
Social recognition or status	14	17	10	6	10	10	5
Limited working hours	6	6	6	6	4	8	6

working for social change was essential to them—only 9, 6 and 6 percent of these students did so, respectively. By contrast, working for social change was much more often considered essential by future lawyers (27%), physicians (20%), and teachers (26%); for these groups the second-least-often-cited essential characteristic of their future careers was social recognition/status, though far fewer future physicians and teachers rated recognition/status essential (10% and 5% did so, respectively) than did lawyers (17%). Other groups that did not often rate status essential were engineers (6%) and teachers (5%). For future teachers, but no other group, high income potential was the third-least-often-cited essential career characteristic (8%).

For the full CSS 2009 Report:

http://www.heri.ucla.edu/PDFs/pubs/Reports/2009_CSS_Report.pdf



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