

The Institute

Turning Information into Insight

A partnership among Geisinger Commonwealth School of Medicine, Johnson College, Keystone College, King's College, Lackawanna College, Luzerne County Community College, Marywood University, Misericordia University, Penn State Scranton, Penn State Wilkes-Barre, The Wright Center for Graduate Medical Education, University of Scranton, and Wilkes University

The Institute for Public Policy & Economic Development (The Institute)

launched a polling program in 2014. The Institute regularly polls 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.

This 2021 poll assesses students' opinions about the region and their post graduation plans. A total of 1,980 students participated in this poll. Students from all class years, a variety of majors, and part-time and graduate students are well-represented in the data. The poll is distributed online through our academic partners. The data was collected during February 2021.



When deciding where to launch their careers, students prioritize availability of jobs in their desired fields, and cost of living.

Additionally, those planning to stay in Northeastern Pennsylvania after graduation assign high value to a location's proximity to family and friends, as well as its suitability to raise a family. They are less likely to value the area's entertainment, recreation, and dining options – or its diversity and inclusiveness.

Conversely, students who plan to depart the area after graduation are likelier to value diversity, inclusiveness, and those entertainment, recreation, and dining options – while downplaying proximity to family and friends, along with suitability for raising families.

When evaluating job opportunities, students also prioritize starting salary along with the opportunity to make a positive impact.

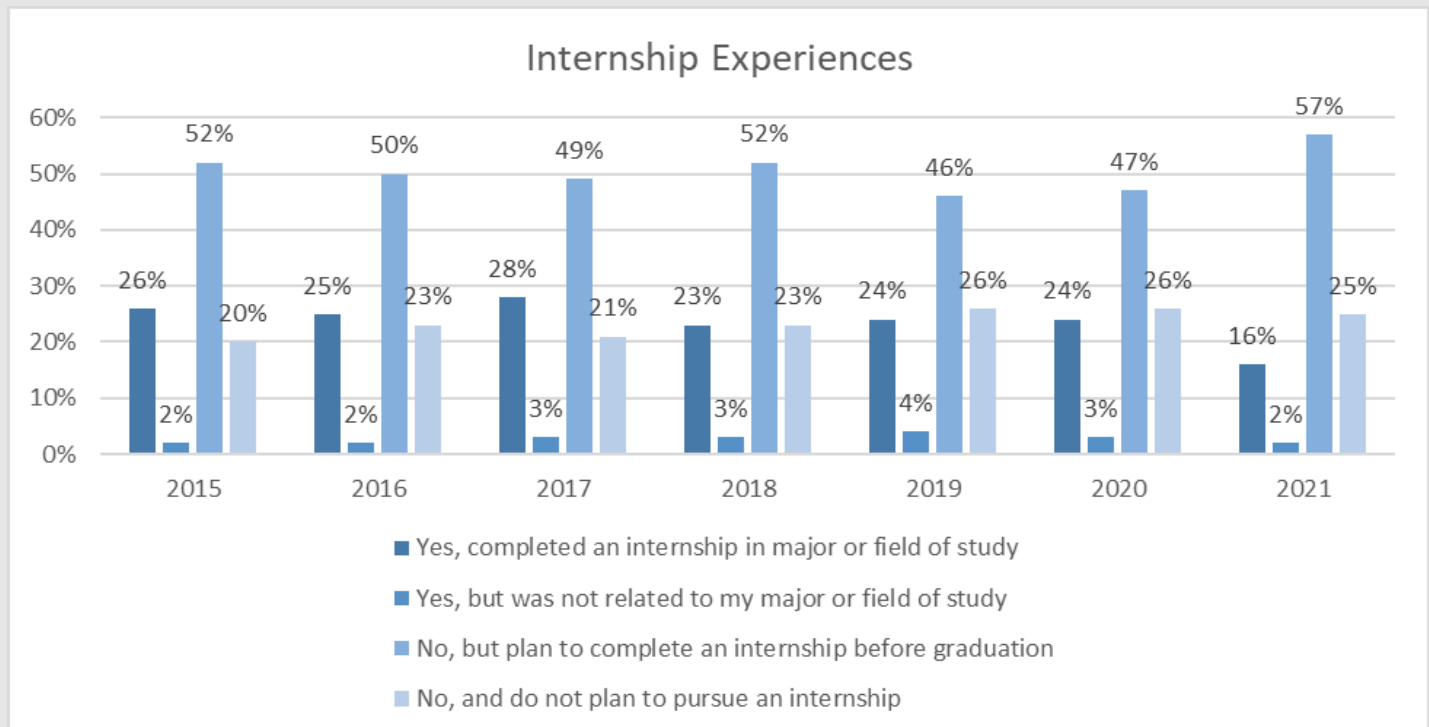
When asked to rank six possible factors to consider when evaluating job opportunities, students placed opportunities *in their desired fields* higher than any other option, with 62.4 percent placing the category first or second on their lists. In descending order, they also consider fringe benefits, desirability of location, and workplace culture.

"The Institute's academic partnerships are proof of the region's rich ecosystem of learning. It is up to educators at all levels to bridge the gap between the classroom and the career, and we certainly have what it takes to equip people with the skills needed to fuel not only professional growth but economic vibrancy as well."

Greg Cant, Ph.D., President & CEO, Wilkes University

Internships continue to be highly valued by students.

In the 2021 poll, 75.6 percent of respondents had either completed or planned to complete an internship before graduation. This percentage has somewhat rebounded from the decline revealed in the 2019 and 2020 polls - prior to which over 75 percent of students either completed or planned to complete internships before graduation. It is also noteworthy that the proportion of respondents who had already completed internships in their fields of study was smaller than the proportions in any other polling year, however, and the share of those with plans to do so was larger than the shares in all other polling years. This shift may be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic and limited ability of employers to safely offer such opportunities.



Completion of a regional internship may induce students to remain in the region after graduation.

Nearly 88.0 percent of students who intend to remain in Northeastern Pennsylvania after graduation have completed internships in the region, compared to 53.6 percent who are likely to depart after receiving their degrees. On the other hand, individuals who did not complete local internships comprise over 46.0 percent of the respondents who are unlikely to remain in NEPA. While no formal causal connection between these two variables can be inferred, a strong connection exists between them.

NEPA Internship by Likelihood of Post-Graduation Relocation	Likely to Stay in NEPA	Unlikely to Stay in NEPA
Yes (completed internship in NEPA)	109 (87.9%)	90 (53.6%)
No (did not complete internship in NEPA)	15 (12.1%)	78 (46.4%)
TOTAL	124	168

POST GRADUATION — WHAT'S NEXT

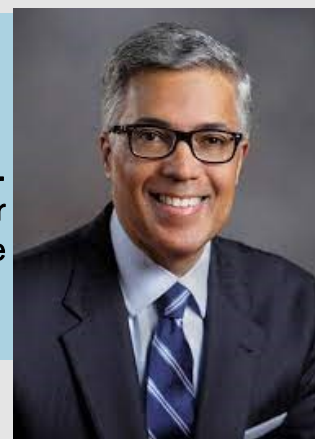
The majority of students who completed internships received academic credit for doing so, and approximately half received payment for their work.

Did you receive academic credit for your internship?	Number of Responses	Percent of Responses
Yes	196	57.5%
No	145	42.5%

Did you get paid for your internship?	Number of Responses	Percent of Responses
Yes, was paid hourly wage/salary	151	44.0%
Yes, received stipend, reimbursement, or other one-time payment	22	6.4%
No	170	49.6%

“From suitable employment opportunities to competitive salaries, students are abundantly clear about what they desire post-graduation. If we want them to flourish in Northeast Pennsylvania, we must draw upon the assets that appeal to them most.”

Dale Jones, Ph.D.
Chancellor and Chief Academic Officer
Penn State Wilkes-Barre



Students feel their education has prepared them for their careers.

The majority of respondents to the most recent poll felt prepared for their intended careers, although this proportion has dropped below 70.0 percent for the first time in all the polling years. In 2021, 69.2 percent of students felt that their college education prepared them either very well or somewhat well for their intended career paths.

However...

Students have grown increasingly anxious about finding employment after graduation.

In each poll, students are asked to indicate their level of anxiety about finding a job after graduation. Every year a majority of students have selected either *extremely* or *somewhat anxious*. Although the total percentage of students who were at least somewhat anxious about the post-graduation job search had continuously dropped over the years studied—falling to 50.8 percent in 2019—it rose to 53.2 percent in 2020 and then to 61.4 percent in 2021.

Prior to the onset of the pandemic in 2019, just under 80.0 percent of responding students felt at least a *little* anxious about the impending job search (an approximate five-percentage point drop from 2015). This proportion shrunk to 78.6 in 2020 but then jumped to 84.0 by 2021.

How well do you think that your college or graduate school education has prepared you for the career you intend to pursue?		
	Frequency	Percent
Very well	612	34%
Somewhat well	623	35%
Adequately	400	22%
Somewhat poorly	73	4%
Very poorly	22	1%
Not sure	55	3%
Total	1,785	

POST GRADUATION—WHAT'S NEXT

"Participation in this poll—not to mention its execution — is greatly appreciated. Student insights are extremely valuable, and having them at my fingertips allows me to make informed decisions with heightened optimism."

**Jill Murray, Ph.D., President,
Lackawanna College**



"These student polls provide great insight into how we can position our region to be more attractive to recent college graduates. It demonstrates that while higher education plays a significant role, many other stakeholders such as business, government, and non-profit organizations and institutions must be active participants in revitalizing the region and engaging students."

**Katie Leonard, Ed.D., President & CEO,
Johnson College**



Students remain interested in graduate school.

Over half of all respondents (51.5 percent) in 2021 responded either *yes*, they plan on attending graduate school or that they are *already in a graduate or professional school*. This has remained consistent over each year of post-graduation polling (2015-2020). The percent of *yes* responses has decreased; however, this is probably due to the addition of the *already in a graduate or professional school* option. This new option still highlights that students find graduate school to be an important next step.



"The Institute's inclusive and vested academic partners and cross-sector industry stakeholders are proof of our region's collaborative potential and our rich ecosystem of learning and workforce development pipeline opportunities. It is our shared responsibility as regional educators and cross-sector employers to bridge the gap between the formative classroom and joyful, satisfying careers steeped in shared purpose that will retain our youth in Northeast PA. Collectively, we have what it takes to inspire and equip people with the crucial skill sets needed to ignite their individual professional growth and also our regional economic prosperity. This annual poll helps illuminate student insights so that as engaged stakeholders we are empowered to make data-based decisions with elevated optimism. I'm grateful for the opportunity to reflect and share my thoughts."

**Linda Thomas-Hemak, MD, FAAP, FACP
CEO, The Wright Center for Community Health
President, The Wright Center for Graduate Medical Education**



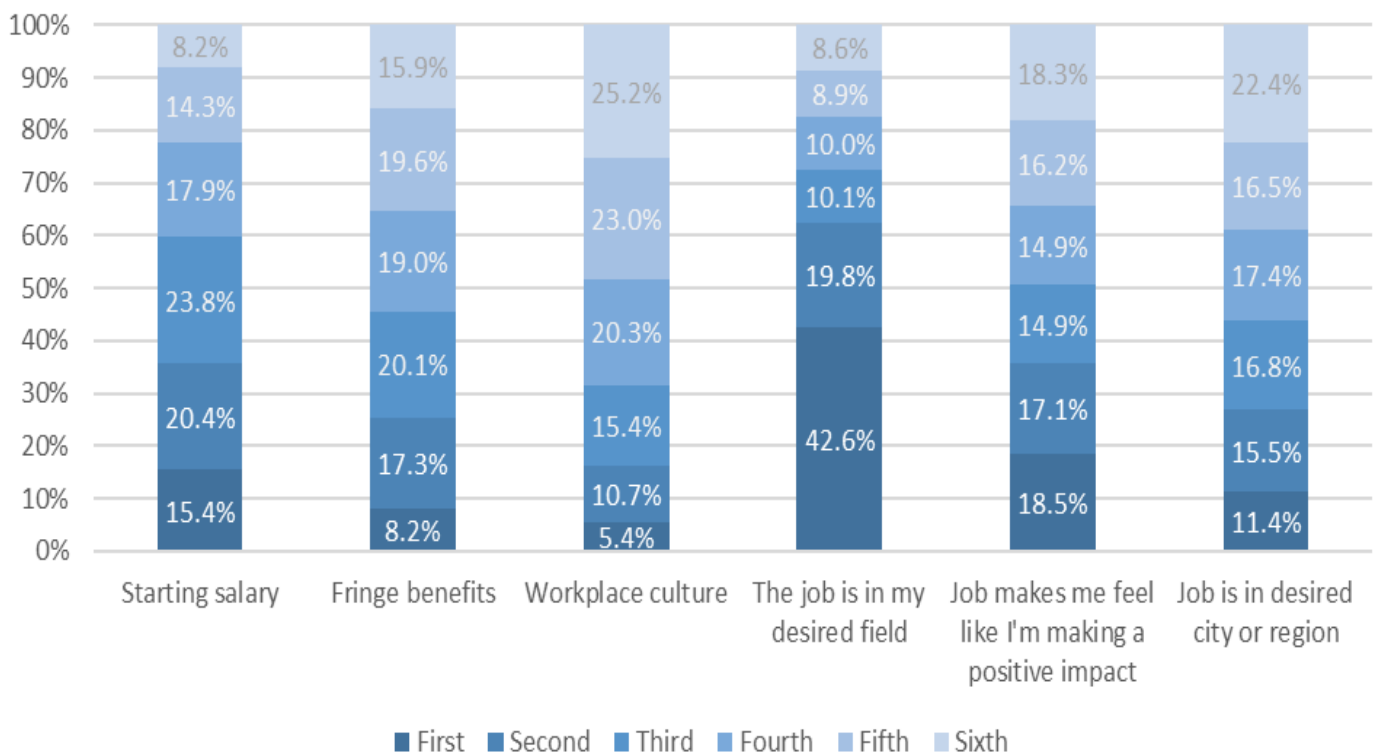
"Students from colleges and universities in our area are abundantly clear about what they desire in their education and their post-graduation lives. If we want them to flourish, and our region to prosper, we must work together to make sure we prepare students with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed, and that our local employers provide suitable opportunities, training, and competitive salaries."

**Tracy Brundage, Ph.D., President,
Keystone College**

Considerations in Job Opportunities.

Respondents were asked to rank six factors they may consider when evaluating a job opportunity. The assigned rankings were 1 through 6, one indicating the *most important*, and six, the *least important*. The factors, with their weighted averages, include *the job being in their desired field* (4.5), *starting salary* (3.8), *feeling as though they are making a positive impact* (3.5), *fringe benefits* (3.3), *location in a desired region* (3.2), and *workplace culture* (2.8). The full distribution of these rankings are shown below, where the bars show the within-category distribution of ranks, and the darker shades correspond with higher rank.

Importance in Consideration of Job Opportunities



Perspectives on the Region—Economy

Respondents were asked to endorse one of a series of statements regarding Northeastern Pennsylvania's economy in relation to the United States as a whole. Nearly 29.0 percent of respondents suggested feeling that the condition of Northeast Pennsylvania was *about the same as the United States* as a whole, while 33.6 percent endorsed some level of belief that the economy of Northeast Pennsylvania was in *worse* condition than the United States as a whole.

Which of the following best describes your perception of the economy of Northeastern Pennsylvania compared with the economy of the United States as a whole?	Number of Responses	Percent of Responses
Northeastern Pennsylvania's economy is much better than that of the United States.	11	0.7%
Northeastern Pennsylvania's economy is somewhat better than that of the United States.	147	9.6%
Northeastern Pennsylvania's economy is about the same as that of the United States.	442	28.8%
Northeastern Pennsylvania's economy is somewhat worse than that of the United States.	428	27.9%
Northeastern Pennsylvania's economy is much worse than that of the United States.	87	5.7%
Not sure	422	27.5%

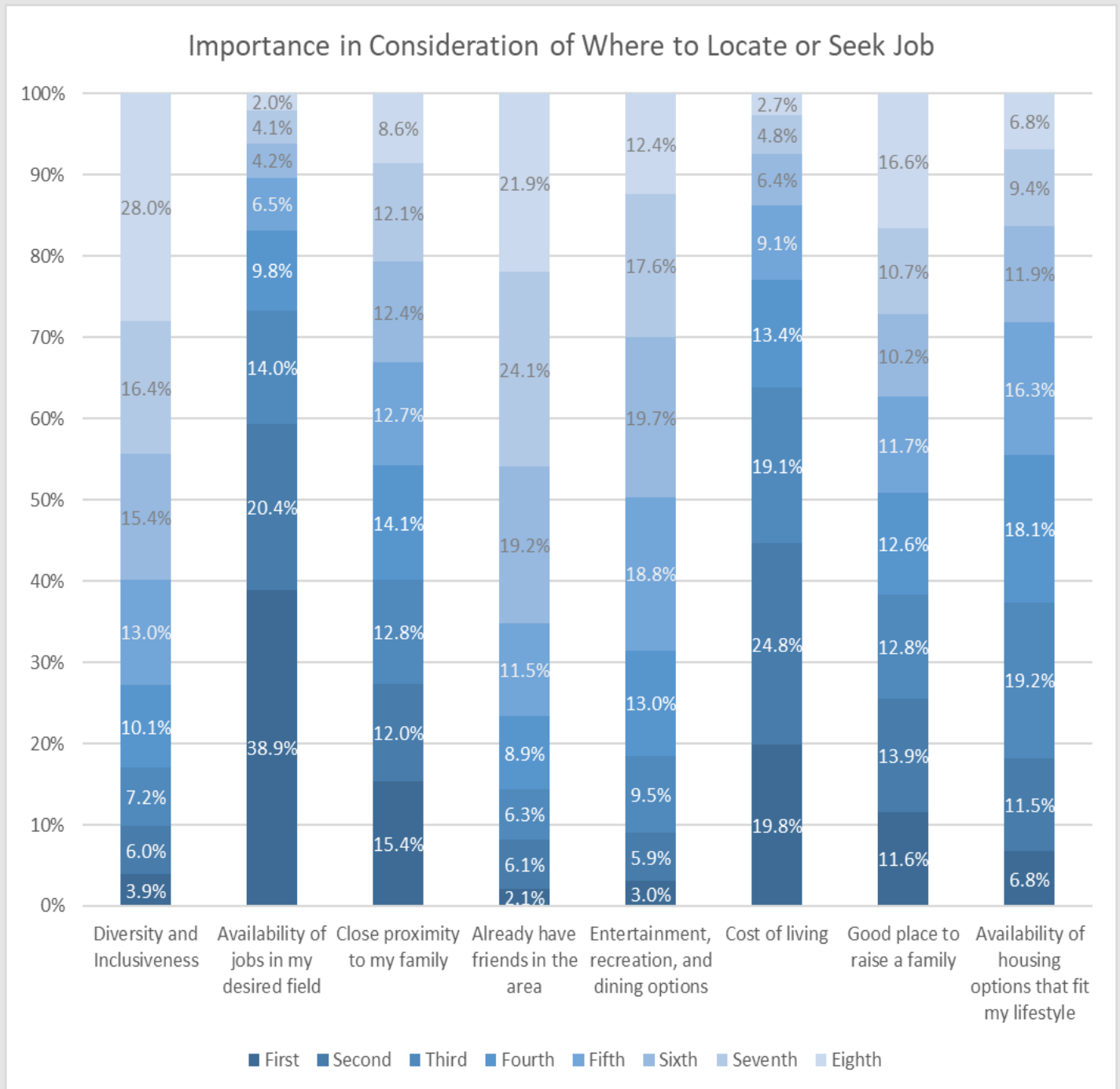
Perspectives on the Region—Quality of Life

Respondents were also asked to endorse one of a series of statements related to the quality of life in Northeastern Pennsylvania compared to the United States as a whole. Almost 31.0 percent of respondents indicated feeling that the quality of life in Northeastern Pennsylvania is either *somewhat* or *much worse* than the United States as a whole. However, 52.6 percent of respondents suggested feeling that NEPA quality of life was about the same as or somewhat better than that of the United States.

Which of the following best describes your perception of the overall quality of life in Northeastern Pennsylvania compared with the quality of life in the United States as a whole?	Number of Responses	Percent of Responses
Northeastern Pennsylvania's quality of life is much better than that of the United States.	33	2.2%
Northeastern Pennsylvania's quality of life is somewhat better than that of the United States.	292	19.0%
Northeastern Pennsylvania's quality of life is about the same as that of the United States.	516	33.6%
Northeastern Pennsylvania's quality of life is somewhat worse than that of the United States.	394	25.6%
Northeastern Pennsylvania's quality of life is much worse than that of the United States.	78	5.1%
Not sure	225	14.6%

Considerations When Locating and Job Seeking

Participants were asked to rank a list of characteristics and features they would consider when deciding where to locate or seek employment after graduation. Items were ranked from first (most important) to eighth (least important). The factors, with their weighted averages, include *availability of jobs in desired field* (6.4); *cost of living* (5.8); *proximity to family* (4.8); *suitable environment appropriate for raising a family* (4.5); *housing options* (4.3); *entertainment, recreation, and dining options* (3.7); *diversity and inclusiveness* (3.2); and *proximity to friends* (3.2). The full distribution of these rankings are shown below, where the bars show the within-category distribution of ranks, and the darker shades correspond with higher rank.



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What We Believe

At The Institute, we believe that empowering leaders with the research-based strategies and solutions they need to make informed decisions will lead to a stronger economy and a better quality of life for regional residents. For over a decade, The Institute has worked behind the scenes to support initiatives that advance regional competitiveness and revitalize communities.

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