

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

Student Polling Project

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 2026 poll assesses students' opinions about the region and their post graduation plans. A total of 482 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, and the data was collected during March and April 2026.

The Institute is an applied research and economic consulting organization that fulfills two related priorities:

- (1) customized client solutions and strategies to facilitate decision-making
- (2) planning that enhances growth, impact, and sustainability for organizations.

The Institute also serves a public mission to provide data, analytics, and research to the community at large. This empirical, objective information is intended to drive discussion and innovative solutions that enhance regional quality of life and standard of living.

The Institute was formed as a unique collaborative of regional higher education institutions and the business community, and founded on the belief that good decisions are driven by good data.

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

Among six options to consider when deciding where they will seek employment after graduation, 49.5 percent ranked availability of jobs in their desired fields either first or second. Nearly 57.0 percent placed cost of living either first or second on their lists.

Students also prioritize opportunities in their desired fields (along with starting salary) when evaluating job options.

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 58.7 percent placing the category first or second on their lists. A plurality nearing 38.0 percent placed starting salary first or second on their lists.

Student perceptions of Northeastern Pennsylvania remain mixed.

About 28.7 percent of students view the Northeastern Pennsylvania's economy as "about the same" as the United States average, while 24.7 percent of respondents view it as worse. Similarly, 33.9 percent of respondents believe the region's quality of life is better than average, while 22.4 percent believe it is worse. A large segment of respondents remains neutral or unsure on their perceptions of the region.

"The 2026 NEPA College Poll provides an important and candid snapshot of our region's future workforce—one that shows students are highly focused on careers, value experiential learning, and feel well-prepared by their education, while also expressing clear concerns about job availability, wages, and overall quality of life in Northeastern Pennsylvania. Year after year, students tell us they value hands-on learning and want meaningful careers in their field, and the NEPA College Poll reinforces the importance of expanding internships and employer partnerships that connect education directly to in-demand regional jobs. At Luzerne County Community College, we are addressing this challenge through PA WORKS and a growing statewide effort to strengthen workforce pipelines in partnership with the Pennsylvania Commission for Community Colleges and TradesFutures."

John Yudichak, President & CEO Luzerne County Community College



Post-Graduation
What's Next? 2026

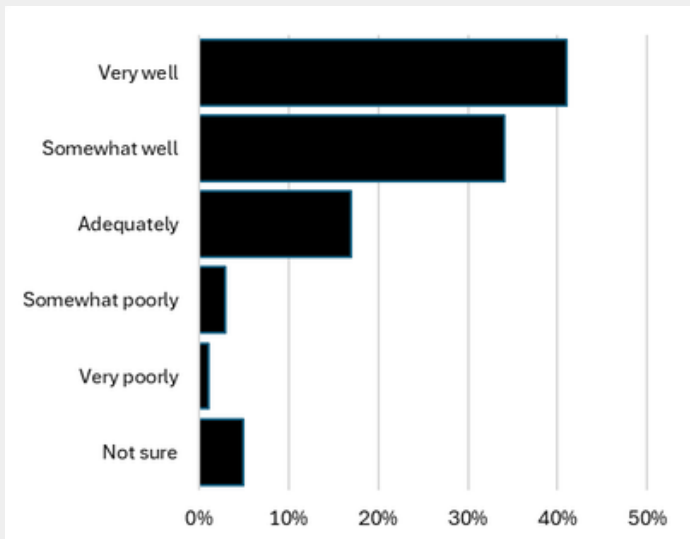
| Did you receive academic credit for your internship | Number of Responses | Percent of Responses |
|---|---------------------|----------------------|
| Yes | 66 | 62.3% |
| No | 40 | 37.7% |

The majority of students who completed internships received academic credit for doing so, and approximately 62.6 percent received payment for their work.

| Did you get paid for you internship? | Number of Responses | Percent of Responses |
|---|---------------------|----------------------|
| Yes, was paid an hourly wage or salary | 57 | 53.3% |
| payment, or reimbursement for living expenses | 10 | 9.4% |
| No, | 40 | 37.4% |

Students face some degree of uncertainty when considering graduate school.

Over half of all respondents in every polling year from 2015 to 2021 responded either yes, they plan on attending graduate school or they are already in a graduate or professional school. These percentages decreased to 45.0 percent in 2022, before rising to 49.0 percent in 2023 and dropping down to 43.0 percent in 2024, when those who were unsure about attending graduate school comprised 34.0 percent of all respondents. In 2026, 39.0 percent of respondents said that they are planning to attend graduate school. Out of those who responded, 36.2 percent reported that they are either very likely or somewhat likely to stay in NEPA post-graduation.



Students feel their education has prepared them for their careers.

The most recent poll showed that the majority of respondents feel prepared for their intended careers. In 2026, 74.6 percent of students felt that their college education prepared them either very well or somewhat well for their intended career paths. Another 16.6 percent reported that they felt adequately prepared. About 4.6 percent felt unsure about being adequately prepared for their intended careers.

“The Institute’s NEPA College Student Poll “Spring 2026 Post-Graduation – What’s Next? offers both encouragement and an important challenge to all of us who share responsibility for the future health and welfare of Northeastern Pennsylvania. I am especially proud that the survey findings include the perspectives of learners from The Wright Center for Graduate Medical Education, alongside students from colleges and universities across our region. The data clearly demonstrate that many young people want to stay, contribute, and build meaningful lives here, but our young up-and-comers are also asking for something very specific in return: strong career opportunity pathways, economic stability, affordable living, healthcare access, and work that feels purposeful and connected to positive community benefit impact. Their responses remind us that retaining the next generation will require more than competitive compensation and recruitment packages. They are calling for sustained investment in career and workforce development opportunities, community vitality, and the type of responsive servant leadership that earns long-term trust and belief in our region’s future.”

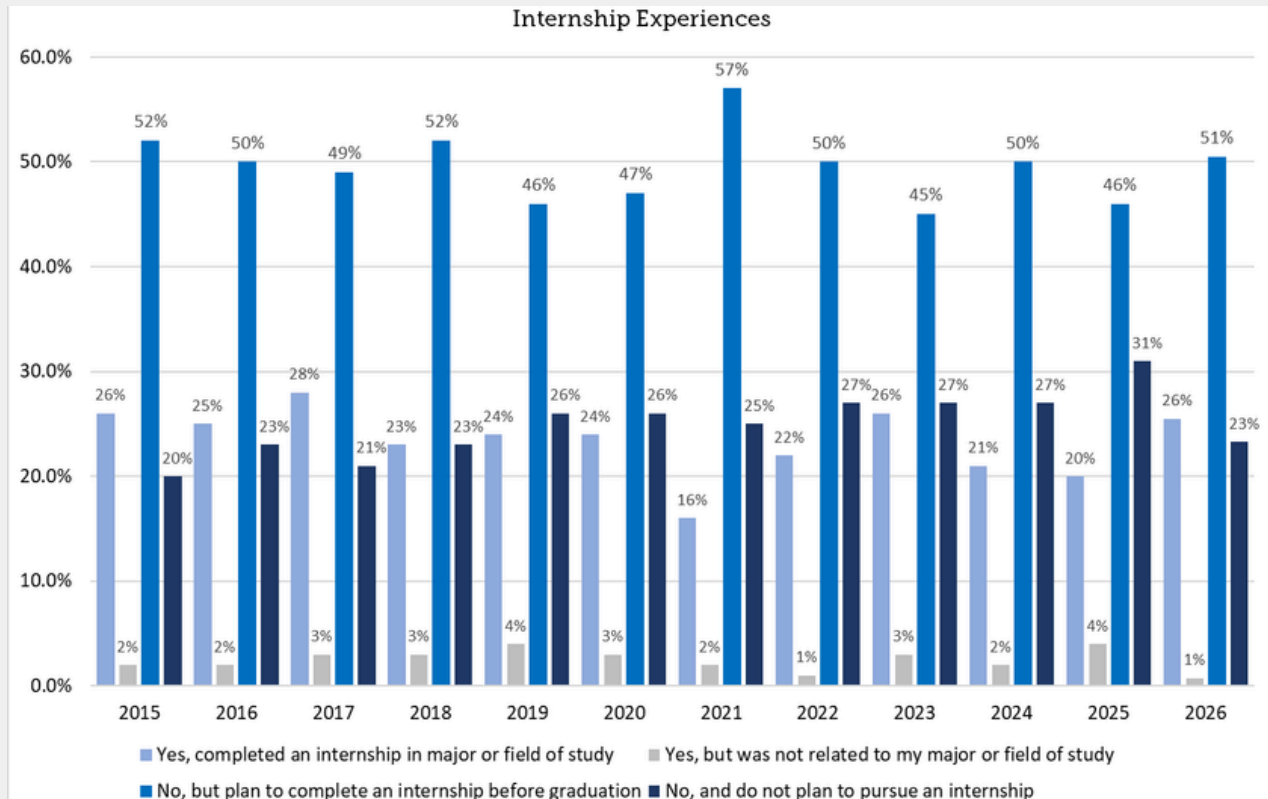
Linda Thomas-Hemak, MD., FACP, FAAP President and CEO The Wright Centers for Community Health and Graduate Medical Education



Post-Graduation What's Next? 2026

Internships continue to be highly valued by students.

In the 2026 poll, 76.7 percent of respondents had either completed or planned to complete an internship before graduation. This is a significant and promising portion of respondents, and is on the rise from 70.0 in 2025 nearing high's recorded from 2015 to 2019. Otherwise, it dropped below 75.0 percent in four other years – 2019, 2020, 2022, 2023, 2024, and 2025.



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

According to responses, 27.2 percent of students who intend to remain in Northeastern Pennsylvania after graduation have completed an internship in the region, compared to 25.8 percent of students who are likely to depart after receiving their degrees. Though no formal causal connection between these variables can be inferred, there is a strong connection.

| NEPA Internship by Likelihood of Post-Graduation Relocation | Likely to Stay in NEPA | Unlikely to Stay in NEPA |
|---|------------------------|--------------------------|
| Yes (completed internship in NEPA) | 27.2% | 34.42% |
| | 52 | 212 |
| No (did not complete internship in NEPA) | 72.3% | 65.6% |
| | 136 | 40 |
| TOTAL | 188 | 62 |

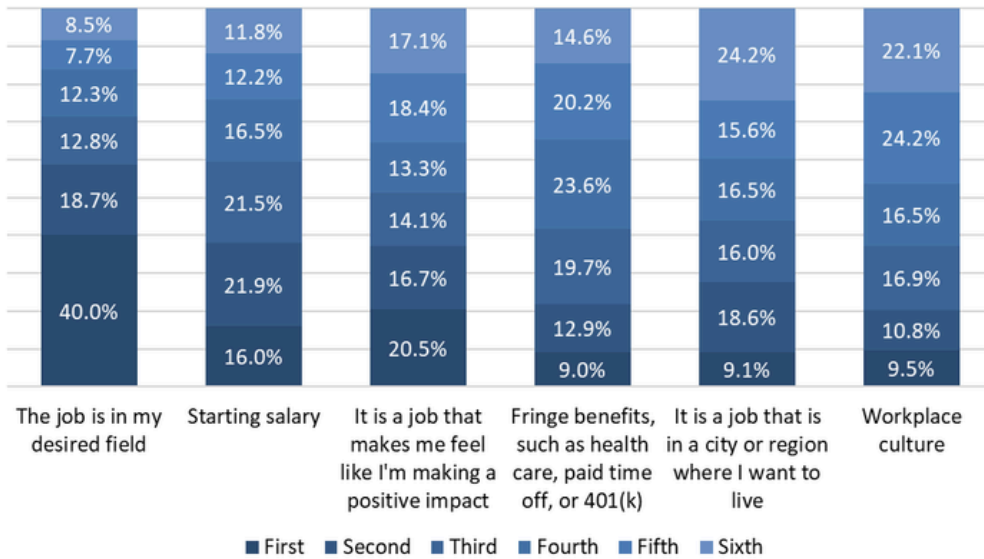


"It's a hallmark of Jesuit education that we value learning that happens both inside and outside of the classroom. As the survey shows, internships are highly valued by students, and we are proud that 80% of The University of Scranton's Class of 2024 completed at least one experiential learning opportunity. Encountering real-world realities as interns, during a clinical placement, or as a student teacher is what helps prepare our students for successful careers in pursuit of the common good."

Joseph G. Marina, S.J., President, The University of Scranton

Post-Graduation What's Next? 2026

Importance in Consideration of Job Opportunities



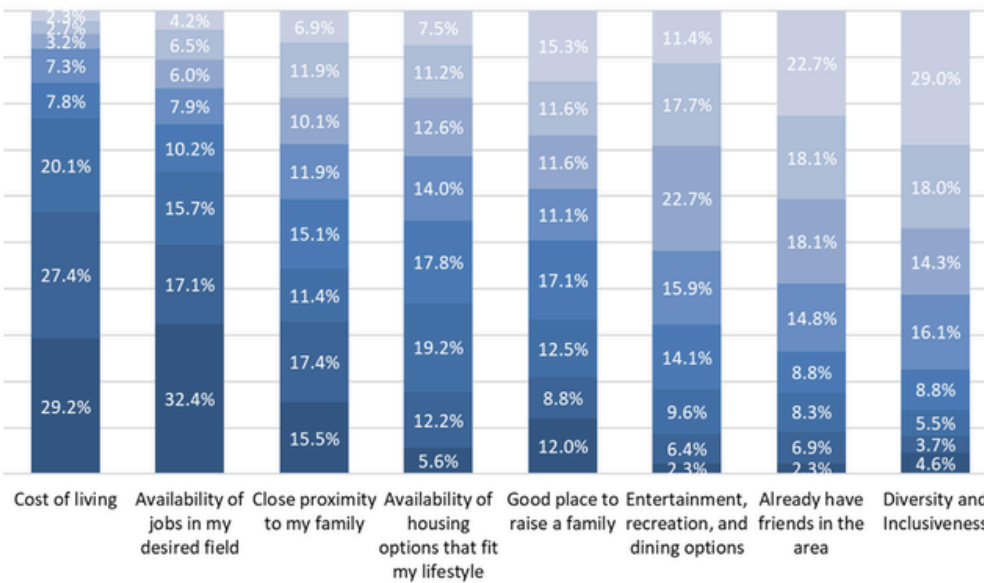
Considerations in Job Opportunities

Availability of a job in a student's desired field is a chief priority for respondents when considering job opportunities. Compared to other options, this factor received the highest weighted average (at 4.5). Other significant factors include starting salary and the opportunity to make a positive impact. Workplace culture had the lowest weighted average (at 3.0).

Considerations When Relocating and Job Seeking

Students were asked to rank a list of characteristics and features they would consider when deciding where to locate or seek employment after graduation from eight options: (1) Diversity and Inclusiveness; (2) Availability of Jobs in My Desired Field; (3) Close Proximity to My Family; (4) Already Have Friends in the Area; (5) Entertainment, Recreation, and Dining Options; (6) Cost of Living; (7) Good Place to Raise a Family; and (8) Availability of Housing Options That Fit My Lifestyle.

Importance in Consideration of Where to Locate or Seek Job



On average, the availability of jobs in students' desired fields and the cost of living were their most important consideration, with the highest weighted averages. Conversely, students seemed least concerned about already having friends in the area.



"Internships remain one of the strongest bridges between classroom learning and meaningful employment, and we will continue expanding access to them."

Jill A. Murray, PH.D., President & Chief Innovation Officer, Lackawanna College

Post-Graduation What's Next? 2026

Perspectives on the Region—Economy

Respondents were asked about Northeastern Pennsylvania's economy in relation to the United States as a whole.

The majority of student perceptions of Northeastern Pennsylvania's economy ranged from apathy to negativity. Overall, 16.0 percent of students who planned to stay in NEPA believed the region's economy to be somewhat better than that of the United States; only 8.0 percent rated it as much better. Approximately 20.7 percent believed it to be worse, however, and another 29.8 percent thought the region's economy is about the same as that of the United States. About 21.3 percent of the students were unsure about the current state of the regional economy.

| Perceptions of the Regional Economy by Likelihood of Post-Graduate Relocation | Likely to Stay in NEPA | Unlikely to Stay in NEPA |
|--|------------------------|--------------------------|
| Northeastern Pennsylvania's economy is much better than that of the United States | 8.0% 15 | 0.0% 0 |
| Northeastern Pennsylvania's economy is somewhat better than that of the United | 16.0% 30 | 9.8% 6 |
| Northeastern Pennsylvania's economy is about the same as that of the United States | 29.8% 56 | 26.2% 16 |
| Northeastern Pennsylvania's economy is somewhat worse than that of the United States | 20.7% 39 | 37.7% 23 |
| Northeastern Pennsylvania's economy is much worse than that of the United States | 4.3% 8 | 9.8% 6 |
| Not sure | 21.3% 40 | 16.4% 10 |
| TOTAL | 188 | 61 |

Perspectives on the Region—Quality of Life

Respondents were also asked the quality of life in Northeastern Pennsylvania compared to the United States as a whole. Their feedback was largely neutral. The share of respondents who planned to stay in NEPA who believe the quality of life to be better than that of the United States (41.0 percent) and the share of respondents who planned to leave NEPA who believe it is worse (50.8 percent) are comparable. A plurality of students who plan to stay in NEPA (30.9 percent) believed the region's quality of life to be about the same as that of the United States, and 11.2 percent were unsure.

| Perceptions of the Regional Quality of Life by Likelihood of Post-Graduate Relocation | Likely to Stay in NEPA | Unlikely to Stay in NEPA |
|--|------------------------|--------------------------|
| Northeastern Pennsylvania's quality of life is much better than that of the United States | 11.2% 21 | 0.0% 0 |
| Northeastern Pennsylvania's quality of life is somewhat better than that of the United | 29.8% 56 | 13.1% 8 |
| Northeastern Pennsylvania's quality of life is about the same as that of the United States | 30.9% 58 | 19.7% 12 |
| Northeastern Pennsylvania's quality of life is somewhat worse than that of the United States | 13.3% 25 | 39.3% 24 |
| Northeastern Pennsylvania's quality of life is much worse than that of the United States | 3.7% 7 | 11.5% 7 |
| Not sure | 11.2% 21 | 16.4% 10 |
| TOTAL | 188 | 61 |

"Internships remain one of the strongest bridges between classroom learning and meaningful employment, and we will continue expanding access to them."

Rev. Thomas P. Looney, C.S.C., Ph.D.
President, King's College



Academic Partners



Wilkes University



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, Maywood University, Misericordia University, Penn State Hazleton, Penn State Scranton, Penn State Wilkes-Barre, The Wright Center for Graduate Medical Education, University of Scranton, Wilkes University, and the business community

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.

2026 Institute Underwriters

Signature Underwriters

Luzerne County
PPL Electric Utilities
Sordoni Family Foundation

Contributing Underwriters

Geisinger Health System
KMLA Group
The Luzerne Foundation

Supporting Underwriters

Andrew J. Sordoni Foundation
BlackOut Design
Greater Hazleton CANDO
Greater Scranton Chamber of Commerce
Highmark
M&T Bank
People Security Bank & Trust
PNC
Rosenn Jenkins & Greenwald LLC
UGI Utilities

Academic Partners

Geisinger Commonwealth School of Medicine
Johnson College
Keystone College
King's College
Lackawanna College
Luzerne County Community College
Maywood University
Misericordia University
Penn State Hazleton
Penn State Scranton
Penn State Wilkes-Barre
The Wright Center for Graduate Medical Education
University of Scranton
Wilkes University

www.institutepa.org

