



**NSHSS**

Be Honored. Be More.



**2024**

# **CAREER INTEREST SURVEY**



# CAREER MOTIVATIONS OF GEN Z

The most current research on the preferences, attitudes, and goals of high-achieving high school and college-aged individuals toward college, employment, and career aspirations. This focused look at Generation Z offers a useful resource for employers working to engage and retain the diverse talent of the future.

# NSHSS scholars represent the most promising diverse talent for the emerging workforce.



## About NSHSS

The National Society of High School Scholars (NSHSS) is a distinguished academic honor society, recognizing and serving the highest-achieving student scholars in more than 26,000 high schools across 170 countries.

With more than 2 million members spanning high school to college to career, NSHSS members are academically outstanding emerging leaders in their schools, workplaces, and communities.

# 2024 Career Interest Survey

Born between 1997 and 2012, Generation Z is significantly larger than the generations that precede it, with more than 90 million members, according to Pew Research. Ranging from 11- to 27-years old, with an average age of 19, many in this generation are making life-changing transitions: graduating high school, attending college, and starting their careers.

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The 2024 Career Interest Survey highlights four themes that characterize Gen Z in the United States:



**Career Aspirations & Employer Preferences**



**Social & Political Engagement**



**Managing Student Debt**



**Perspectives on AI**

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## Survey Methodology

This marks the 15th edition of the NSHSS Career Interest Survey and the first update since 2022. The report reveals the preferences and attitudes of high-achieving high school students, college students, and recent college graduates. Together, these scholars have an average GPA of 3.72.

The findings contained in this report reveal their opinions on education, career and employment aspirations, civic involvement, and Artificial Intelligence.

This wave of the study was conducted from January 17 to March 6, 2024, through a self-administered online survey. As in years past, the study yielded great geographic representation, with the over 10,000 participants representing all 50 states, the District of Columbia, U.S. military bases overseas, and U.S. territories of American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Results were weighted by Census Region and gender, when specified, to produce estimates more representative of the overall population.

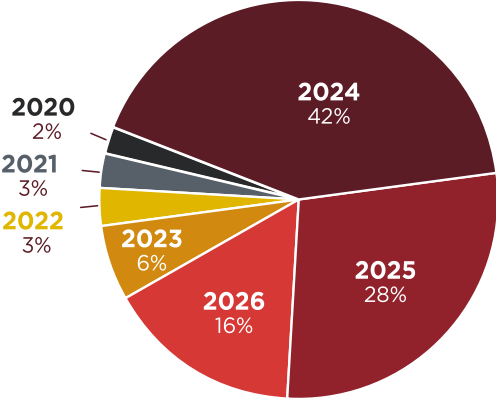
Results were not weighted by age, as career interest correlates to age. Overall, high-school students, as in past years, represent the vast majority of the sample at 86%.

Reflecting the diversity of Gen Z, the majority of participants were from minority groups: 42% white, 18% Latino, 14% Black / African American, 9% Asian American / Pacific Islander, and 10% multi-racial.

# Participant Profile

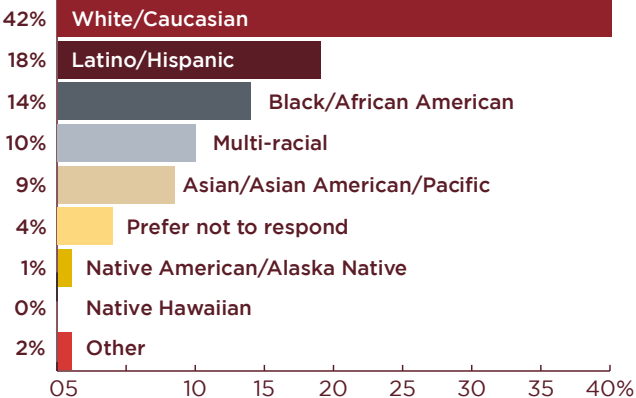
## GRADUATION YEAR

What is or was your high school graduation year?



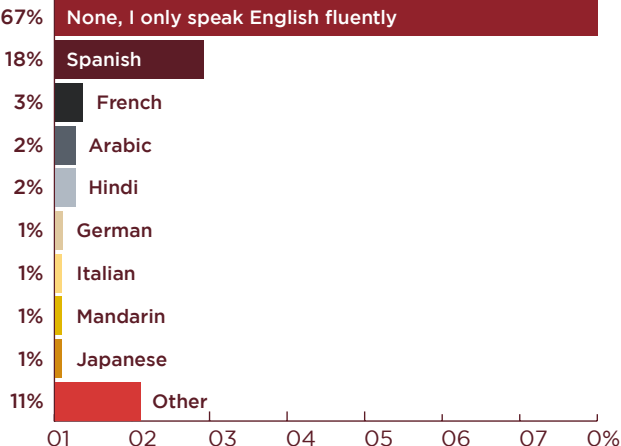
## ETHNICITY

What is your ethnicity?



## LANGUAGES

Which of the following languages, if any, do you speak fluently or as a native language in addition to English?



# Themes Shaping Gen Z

The four key themes covered in this year's survey include a look at career aspirations, education, and student debt, social and political engagement, and attitudes towards AI (Artificial Intelligence).



## Career Aspirations and Employer Preferences

The impact of COVID-19 is clear to see when looking at Gen Z's career aspirations, with 46% of respondents interested in going into medicine or health-related fields. Engineering and science were the next highest interests at 18% respectively. When looking at potential employers, the most important factors are fair treatment of employees (28%), work-life balance (25%), and corporate social responsibility (14%). On top of health benefits (72%) Gen Z also values their personal time, with time-off (63%) and flexible work schedules (61%) as the most valued compensation and benefits. They are also keeping an eye on their next career move and seek out employers who will invest in them, with professional development opportunities (86%) and clear pathways to promotion (44%) as the most sought-after work experiences.



## Education and Student Debt

Students are well aware of the struggles of student debt, but their concerns are not preventing them from pursuing higher education. When it comes to financial assistance, scholarships (52%), jobs while in college, and family assistance are the top contributors for financing education. However, when it comes to pursuing passions as a career, Gen Z is more skeptical, citing concerns around making a sufficient income (63%), achieving work-life balance (54%), and having job stability (52%).





## Social and Political Engagement

Gen Z is passionate when it comes to their values and are one of the most politically and socially involved generations in decades. The issues they consider most important are healthcare/health-related (32%), human rights (29%), and the environment/energy (29%). With a presidential election taking place at the end of the year, this will be the first election where many respondents will be old enough to participate. When it comes to casting their vote, the most important issues for these young voters are the economy (63%), social justice and civil rights (54%), and government corruption (52%).



## Perspectives on Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Artificial Intelligence has shaken up businesses in every industry, but it will have a bigger impact on the careers of Gen Z compared to older generations. Today, respondents primarily use AI for brainstorming (39%), proofreading (33%), and data analysis (21%). Respondents are divided on whether AI will have a more positive (41%) or negative (59%) impact on society in the next ten years. The top concerns around AI include its impact on personal privacy (55% extremely or very much) and job displacement (62%) somewhat, very, or extremely worried.

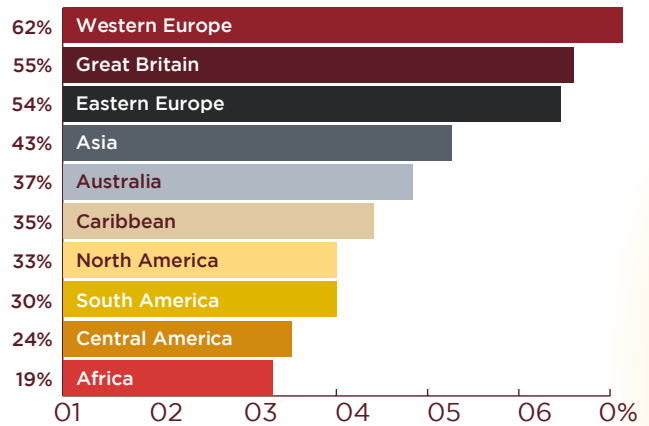
## International Experiences

The lure of international education is strong: 67% are interested in gaining international experiences (e.g., studying abroad, being an exchange student), this is down slightly from 70% in 2022. Despite study abroad interest, only 2% have or want to have International Studies/Relations as a major.

When it comes to international experiences after school, just 19% considered international opportunities to be one of their top two criteria for comparing potential employers.

## STUDY ABROAD

Where would you like to study abroad?

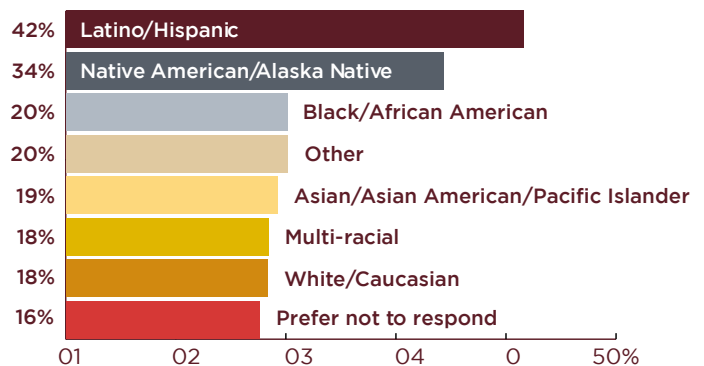


## Education without Limits

The amount of **first-time college attenders remains steady at 24%**, the same as our 2022 survey. The trend is attributed to the ongoing increase in proportions of ethnicities for whom college is more often a first-time experience.

## FIRST-GENERATION NSHSS SCHOLARS ATTENDING COLLEGE

Are you (or will you) be the first in your family to attend college?





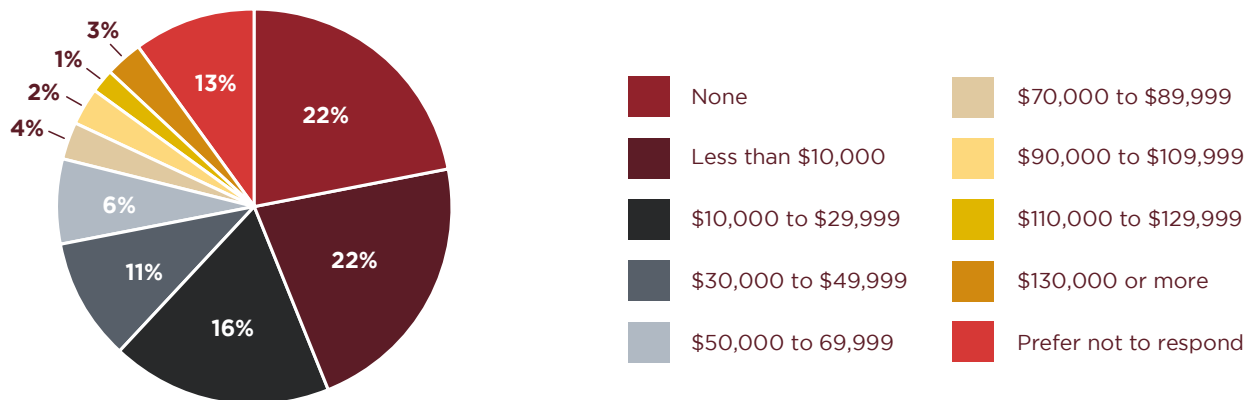
## The Economics of Education

When asked how they plan to pay for higher education, and just over half of participants (52%) expect scholarships to be the #1 contributor. Overall, when analyzing their rankings for each option, the second-leading contributor was a job while in college, third was family assistance, fourth was grants, fifth was personal savings, and sixth was student loans.

Regarding student loans, 22% expect to have no college debt, with another 22% expecting to have less than \$10,000 in debt; at the other extreme, 16% expect to have \$50,000 or more in debt. However, 41% believe that student loan debt has or will prevent them from pursuing their passions.

### EXPECTED DEBT

How much college debt did you or do you expect to have?



When asked how they planned to pay off their student debt, participants talked about savings, budgeting, and working.

***“I expect to pay off student debt while managing my career by having a budget and financial plan. I also plan to advance in my career to increase my earning potential to help accelerate debt repayment.”***

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Despite jobs being an important part of the equation for managing student debt, the proportion of college students without a job continues to rise, from 37% in 2020 (pre-pandemic) to 42% in 2022 and to 48% in the most recent 2024 results. 63% of high school students surveyed do not currently have a job.

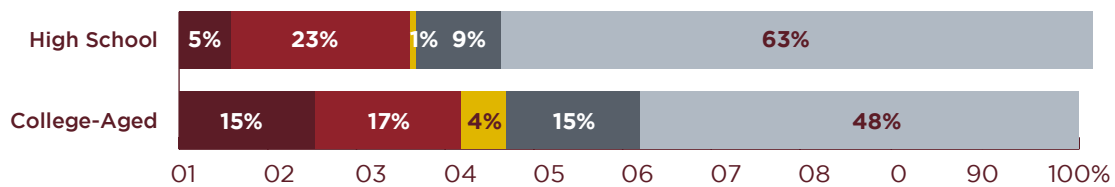
In addition, to further be able to pay for student loans, two thirds of NSHSS scholars (66%) expect to be living at home when they start their first job, and the majority of those plan to stay at home for more than a year.



## WORKING STUDENTS

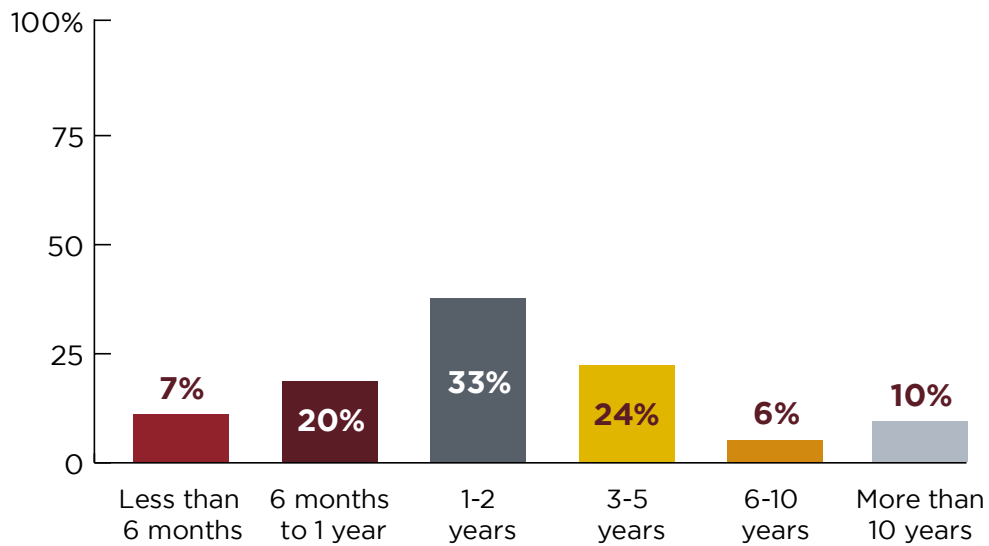
Which of the following best applies to you?

- I currently have a job that I need to contribute to my household/family's finances
- I currently have a job, but the money is just for my personal use
- I currently have a job that I am using to pay off student loans
- I currently have a job that I am using to help pay for higher education
- I do not currently have a job



## POST COLLEGE LIVING

After getting your first job, how long did you, or do you expect to, live at home?



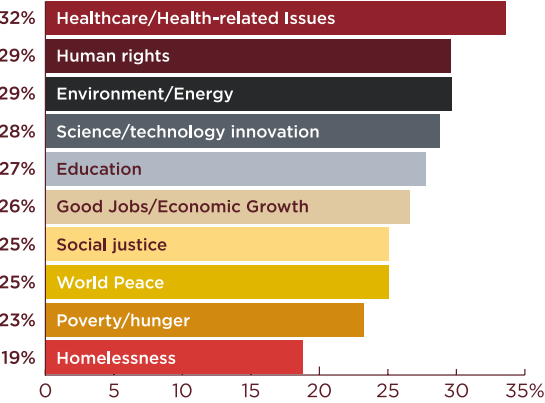


# Purpose

Healthcare/health-related issues have surpassed human rights as the most important issue to NSHSS scholars, while interest in science/tech innovation has dropped from 34% to 28%.

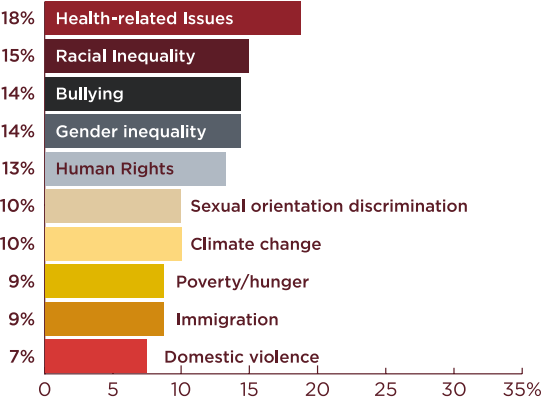
## ISSUES OF IMPORTANCE

What issues are you most interested in impacting in your world?



## PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Does your personal experience with any of the following issues influence your choice of career?



Participants reported their career choice was influenced by their personal experience with health-related issues (18%), racial inequality (15%), bullying and/or gender inequality (both at 14%), or any of many other issues.

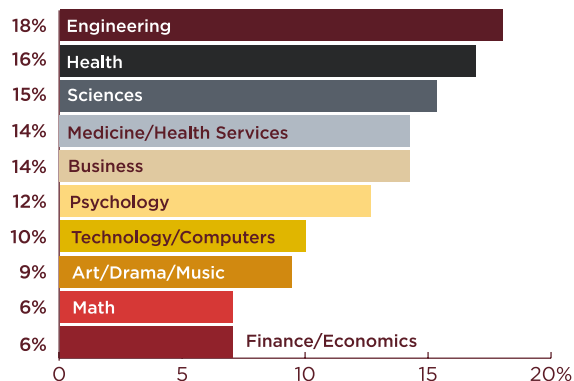


## Career Expectations

NSHSS scholars are primarily interested in pursuing degrees that will prepare them for STEM and healthcare careers. Of the four STEM majors: 18% were interested in Engineering, 15% in Science, and 10% in Technology; however, Math fell out of the top 10, dropping from 7% in 2022 to 5% in 2024. For healthcare: 16% were interested in Health, 14% in Medicine/Health Services, and 12% in Psychology.

### CURRENT/INTENDED MAJOR

What is your intended or current undergraduate major(s)?



### DISPARITIES IN STEM CAREERS

Unfortunately, almost every profession showed statistically significant differences by gender. STEM careers remain divided by gender with women being more likely than men to enter the fields of Medicine, Science, and Biology, but far less likely to consider Engineering or Computer Science. Scholars identifying as non-binary are more likely to consider a career in Arts & Entertainment. However, they are also more likely than men to enter healthcare fields and more likely than women to pursue engineering and computer science. For the most part, STEM careers are seen as an area of opportunity for scholars of color, who are often more likely to enter the STEM and health fields than whites.

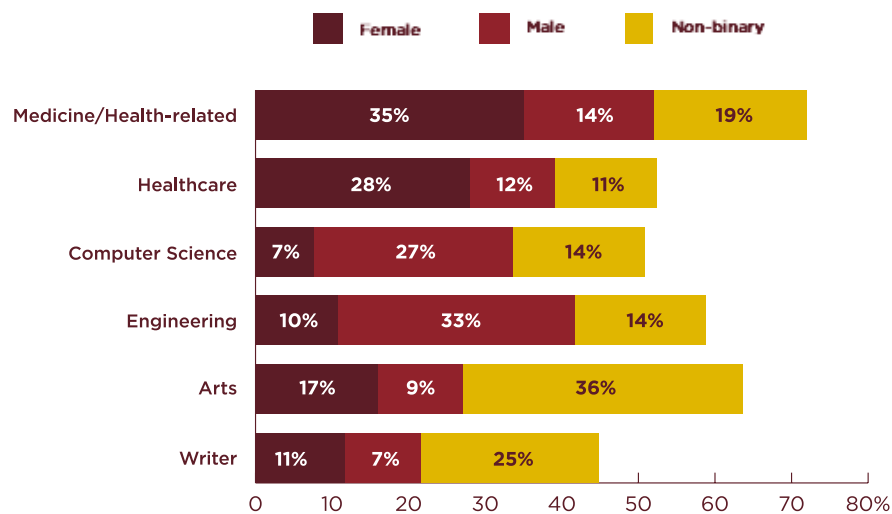
## STEM & ETHNICITY

In what type(s) of field do you expect to work in the future? By Race/Ethnicity

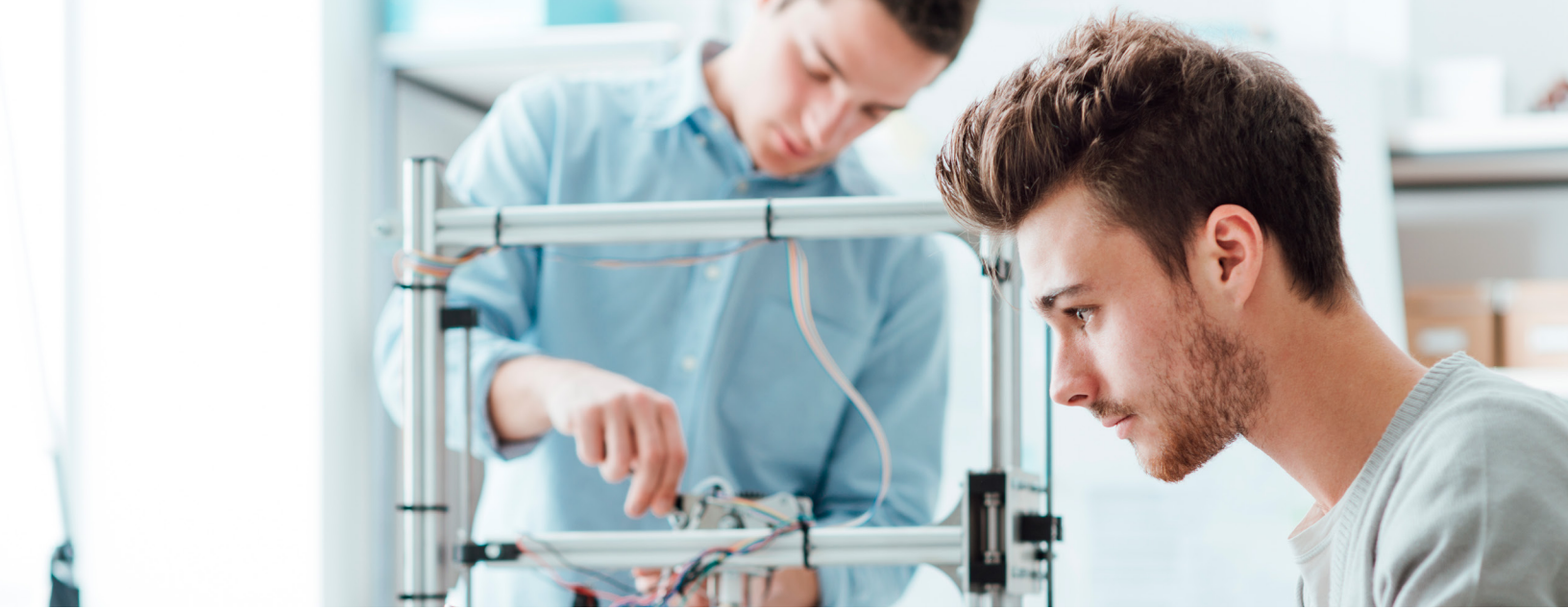
	Multi-racial	Native American/Alaskan Native	White/Caucasian	Asian/Asian American/Pacific Islander	Native Hawaiian	Black/African American	Latino/Hispanic
Sciences	20%	14%	21%	24%	0%	15%	17%
Technology	12%	19%	8%	16%	7%	11%	11%
Engineering	18%	26%	14%	20%	13%	14%	17%
Medicine/Health-related	27%	24%	25%	33%	20%	25%	29%

## STEM & GENDER

In what type(s) of field do you expect to work in the future? By Gender





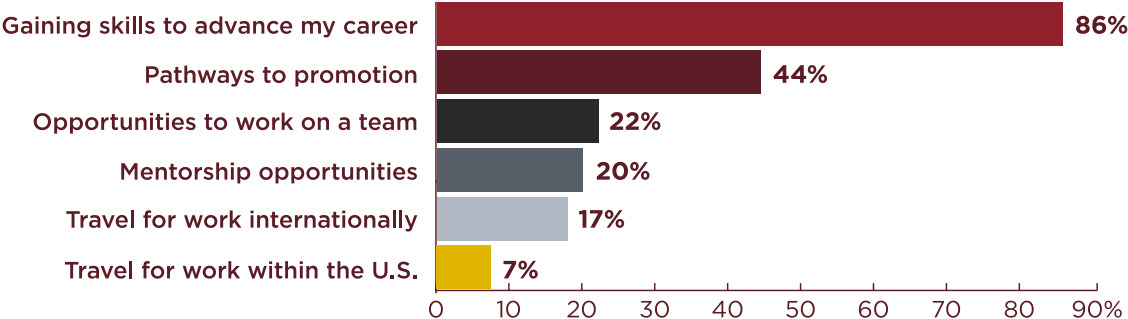


# Employer Preferences & Expectations

## WORK EXPERIENCE

When considering potential employers, what is most important to you about the work experience?

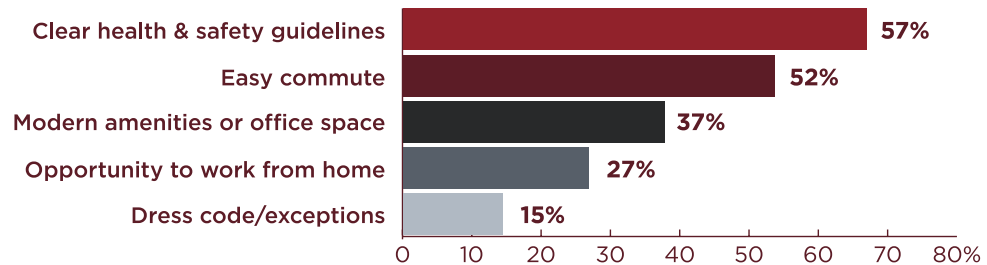
Looking specifically at what Gen Z wants from the work experience, most important was gaining skills to advance their careers (86%). Pathways to promotion (44%) was a distant second. Less important were opportunities to work on a team (22%) or mentorship opportunities (20%).



When asked how they expect their employer to invest in them, most expect in-person training (67%). Nearly half expect leadership development training (48%) and four out of ten (41%) expect tuition reimbursement for a Master’s degree or other postgraduate degree.

## EMPLOYER INVESTMENT

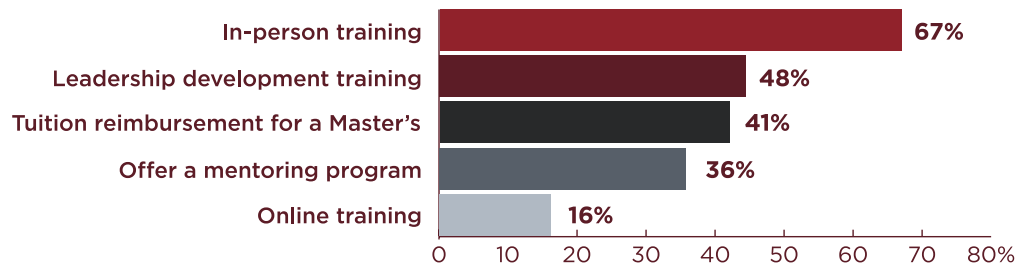
How do you expect your employer to invest in you?



## WORKING CONDITIONS

When considering potential employers, what is most important to you about the working conditions?

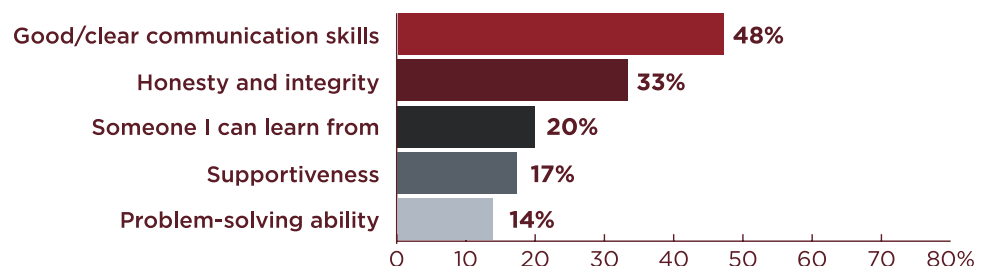
Looking at work conditions, the most important were clear health and safety guidelines (57%) or an easy commute (52%). With concerns about COVID receding, few (4%) said that space for social distancing was important.



## QUALITIES IN MANAGEMENT

Which of the following are the most important qualities for bosses/managers to have?

Nearly half of the scholars surveyed say the most important quality a manager can have is good/clear communication skills (48%). A third say it is honesty and integrity, while a fifth say it is someone to learn from.





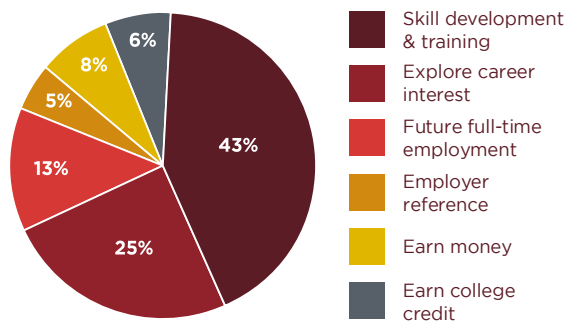
## Internships

More than nine out of ten (92%) NSHSS scholars expect to participate in an internship. When asked what they would most like to gain from it, the #1 priority was skill development and training, followed by the chance to explore career interest.

Almost three quarters of participants (70%) were extremely or very interested in a certification course to prepare for an internship.

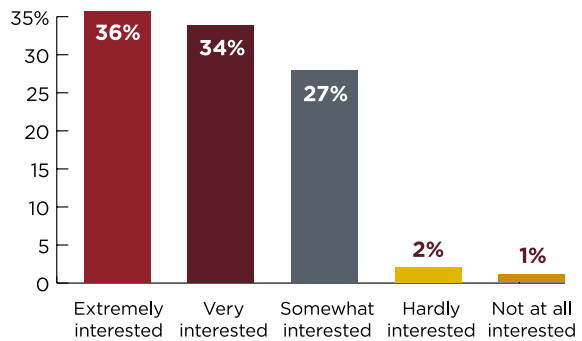
### EXPERIENCE

What would you most like to gain from an internship?



### CERTIFICATION

How interested would you be in a certification course to prepare you for an internship?



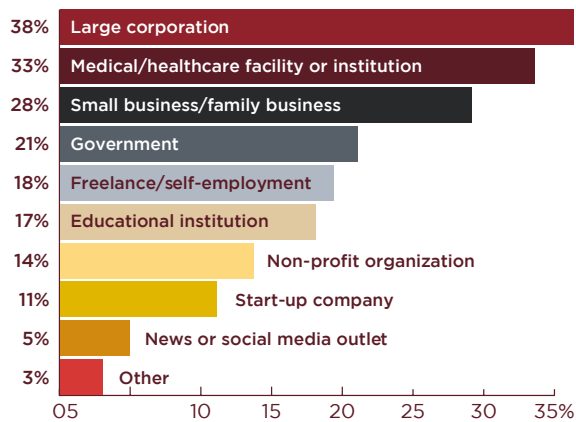


## Top Employers of Choice

Gen Z prefers working for large corporations over small/family businesses. Unsurprisingly, given the interest in medical professions, working at a medical facility or institution is in the top three. Interest in entrepreneurship is high, with almost one out of five (18%) interested in being freelancers or self-employed and 11% wanting to work for a start-up. At number four was a desire to work for a government organization.

### EMPLOYER TYPE

When seeking employment, what types of organizations do you most prefer?



Hospitals earn many of the top spots for desired employers:

**#1** for St. Jude Children's Hospital

**#2** for Mayo Clinic

**#4** for a local hospital

Preferred Employer	2024	2022
St. Jude Children's Research Hospital	1↕	2
Mayo Clinic	2↕	7
Health Care Service Corp.	3↕	14
Local Hospital	4↕	1
FBI	5↕	6
National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)	6↕	12
Google	7↕	4
Amazon	8↕	5
Apple	9↕	8
Walt Disney Company	10	10
Central Intelligence Agency	11	19
Children's Healthcare of Atlanta	12	23
Red Cross	13	-
Center for Disease Control and Prevention	14	18
Netflix	15	11
Microsoft	16	13
Delta Air Lines	17	34
The New York Times	18	24
Meridian Health	19	33
Nintendo	20	-
DreamWorks Animation SKG	21	17
SpaceX	22	9
U.S. Air Force	23	29
Universal Studios	24	26
Chick-fil-A	25	32
Spotify	26	3
Teach For America	27	47
Target Corp.	28	45
U.S. State Department	29	28
SONY	30	21
Nike	31	20
Starbucks	32	16
Tesla Motors	33	15
Build-A-Bear Workshop	34	58

Preferred Employer	2024	2022
U.S. Army	35	36
Blue Cross and Blue Shield	36	51
Atlanta Health Systems	37	30
Boeing	38	39
Mercedes Benz USA	39	61
National Security Agency (NSA)	40	-
Bank of America	41	56
CHG Healthcare Services	42	55
Lockheed Martin	43	22
National Football League	44	38
Abercrombie & Fitch / Hollister	45	49
Major League Soccer	46	63
Adobe Systems	47	35
Instagram	48	43
Airbnb	49	27
Pfizer	50	48
ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union)	51	-
National Basketball Association	52	41
Local police department	53	25
Major League Baseball	54	40
UnitedHealth Group	55	77
Lululemon	56	43
Boston Scientific	57	70
Kaiser Permanente	58	53
U.S. Navy	59	59
CVS Caremark	60	68
GPS Hospitality	61	88
Ford Motor Co.	62	79
Hilton Hotels & Resorts	63	81
American Airlines	64	37
JPMorgan Chase	65	87
CNN	66	52
L'Oreal	67	75
Dell	68	88
WellStar Health System	69	63

\* Hand arrows signify increase or decrease compared to 2022 results

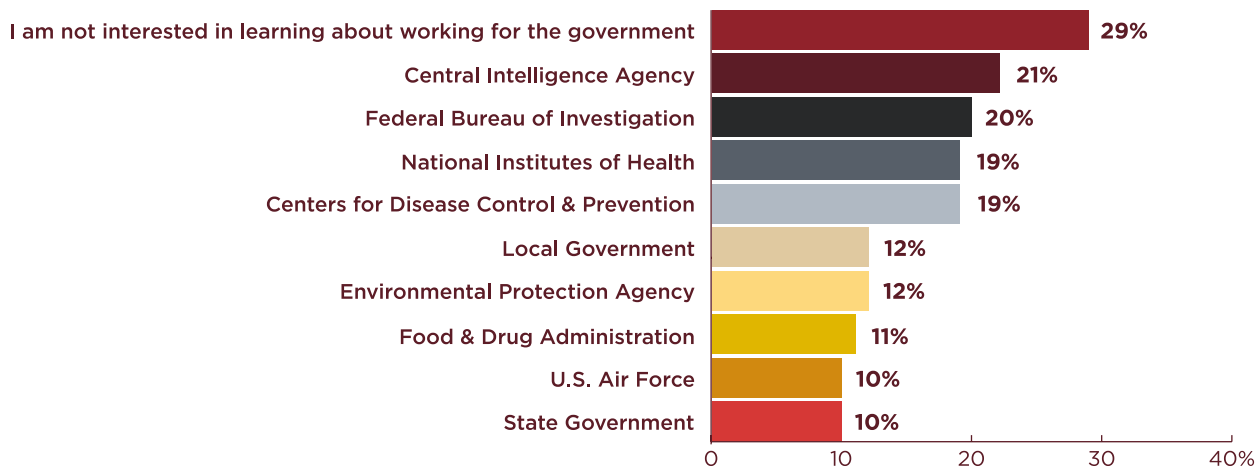
Preferred Employer	2024	2022
Valve (Stream)	70	65
ChatGPT	71	-
T-Mobile	72	85
Johnson & Johnson	73	57
U.S. Marine Corps	74	89
Wal-Mart Stores Inc.	75	71
Local fire department	76	72
Whole Foods Market	77	-
The Everett Clinic	78	76
Toyota	79	81
Dow Chemical	80	66
Intel	81	67
Samsung	82	60
Duke Energy	83	54
Southern Ohio Medical Center	84	75
Forbes	85	62

Preferred Employer	2024	2022
Wells Fargo & Co.	86	90
3M	87	42
Costco Wholesale	88	94
IBM Corp.	88	93
Buzzfeed	90	50
Ohio Health	91	83
Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide	92	-
Scripps Health	93	86
Facebook	94	79
Ebay	95	72
Southwest Airlines	96	84
Lyft	97	74
LiveNation	98	-
United Way	99	-
WestRock	100	0

## GOVERNMENT WORK

Which of the following government departments/agencies/offices in the United States are you interested in learning about?

When asked to focus just on government departments/agencies/offices they would be interested in learning about, the top three were the CIA, the FBI, and the NIH. About one out of three of all participants indicated that they were not interested in learning about working for the government.



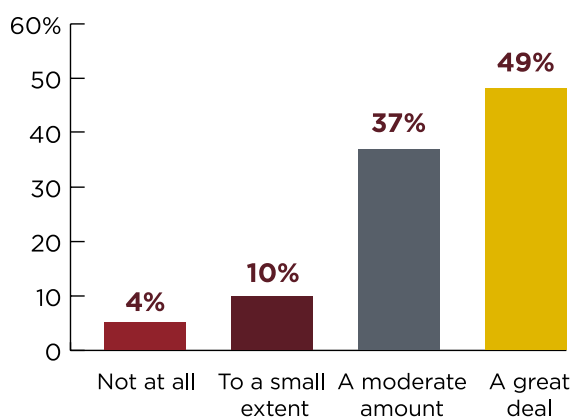


## Top Preferred Colleges & Universities

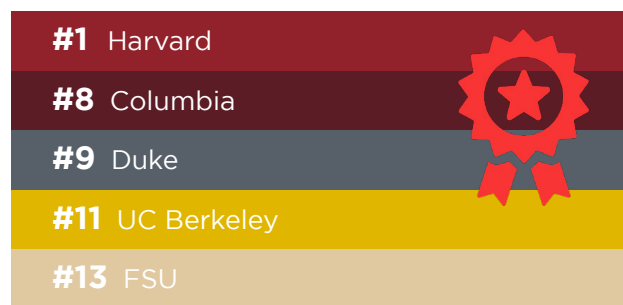
NSHSS high-school scholars are college-bound. Only 1% do not wish to attend college. Both those in high school and those in college expect their undergraduate major to support their career.

### DEGREE USE

To what extent do you think you will be able to use, or have you used, your undergraduate degree in your career?



High-school students were asked to provide up to five of their preferred colleges. Harvard kept its spot at #1. New to the Top #10 was Columbia, rising to #8 from #11, while Duke returned to the Top 10, rising to #9 after tying for #11 in 2022 and being #8 in 2020. UC Berkeley and FSU fell out of the top 10 rankings, dropping to #11 and #13 respectively.



Preferred College or University	2024	2022
Harvard University	1	1
Texas A&M University	2↕	3
University of California, Los Angeles	3↕	4
Yale University	4	4
New York University	5↕	2
University of Florida	6	6
Stanford University	7	7
Columbia University	8↕	11
University of Texas, Austin	9↕	8
Duke University	10↕	11
University of California, Berkeley	11	10
Pennsylvania State University	12	18
Florida State University	13	9
Massachusetts Institute of Technology	14	15
Princeton University	15	23
University of Alabama	16	30
Baylor University	17	20
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor	18	21
Georgia Institute of Technology	19	22
University of Georgia	20	13
Purdue University	21	19
Johns Hopkins University	22	29
University of Pennsylvania	23	38
University of Central Florida	24	17
Howard University	25	16
University of Southern California	26	35
Louisiana State University	27	35
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill	28	43
Cornell University	29	27
Arizona State University	30	14
Brown University	31	24
Rice University	32	46
Michigan State University	33	57
Boston University	34	27
University of California, San Diego	35	26
University of South Florida	36	31

Preferred College or University	2024	2022
North Carolina State University	37	39
University of Chicago	38	31
University of Washington, Seattle	39	50
Ohio State University, Columbus	40	44
University of California, Irvine	41	48
Virginia Tech	42	84
University of Miami	43	39
Vanderbilt University	44	41
Clemson University	45	46
Texas Tech University	46	37
Auburn University	47	70
Rutgers University	48	48
Savannah College of Art and Design	49	71
Brigham Young University	50	80
Florida International University	51	51
University of Arizona	52	54
Emory University	53	66
University of California, Davis	54	65
Kennesaw State University	55	62
Georgia State University	56	24
University of South Carolina	57	44
University of Notre Dame	58	91
Colorado State University	59	71
Mississippi State University	60	77
University of Tennessee	61	52
Northern Arizona University	62	58
George Mason University	63	79
Texas State University	64	52
University of Maryland, College Park	65	56
Texas Christian University	66	
Spelman College	67	59
University of Houston	68	31
Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University	69	60
University of California, Santa Barbara	70	
Indiana University, Bloomington	71	63
University of Colorado, Boulder	72	68

\* Hand arrows signify increase or decrease in Top Ten schools compared to 2022 results



Preferred College or University	2024	2022
Florida Atlantic University	73	75
San Diego State University	74	91
University of Virginia	75	66
Florida A&M University	76	42
Georgetown University	77	69
University of Minnesota	78	73
University of Wisconsin	79	54
Northeastern University	80	82
Washington State University	81	100
Oregon State University	82	100
Liberty University	83	84
University of Kentucky	84	97
University of Utah	85	
North Carolina A&T State University	86	31

Preferred College or University	2024	2022
California Institute of Technology	87	
Iowa State University	88	84
University of Texas, San Antonio	89	88
Virginia Commonwealth University	90	
Northwestern University	91	77
Oklahoma State University	92	97
Georgia Southern University	93	
University of North Texas	94	80
California State University, Long Beach	95	63
University of Oregon	96	88
University of Connecticut	97	97
Grand Canyon University	98	
Clark Atlanta University	98	
Stony Brook University	98	

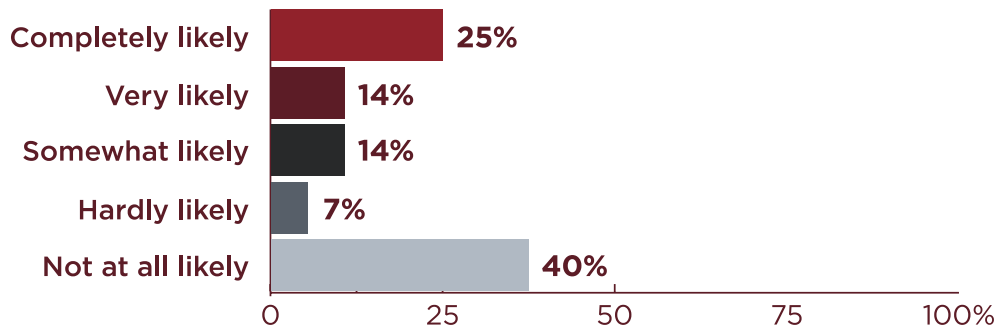


## Community & Civic Engagement

Gen Z is known for their passion when it comes to political issues. While not all NSHSS scholars are old enough to vote in the coming election, their opinions on the issues were loud and clear.

### 2024 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

How likely are you to vote in the 2024 Presidential Election?

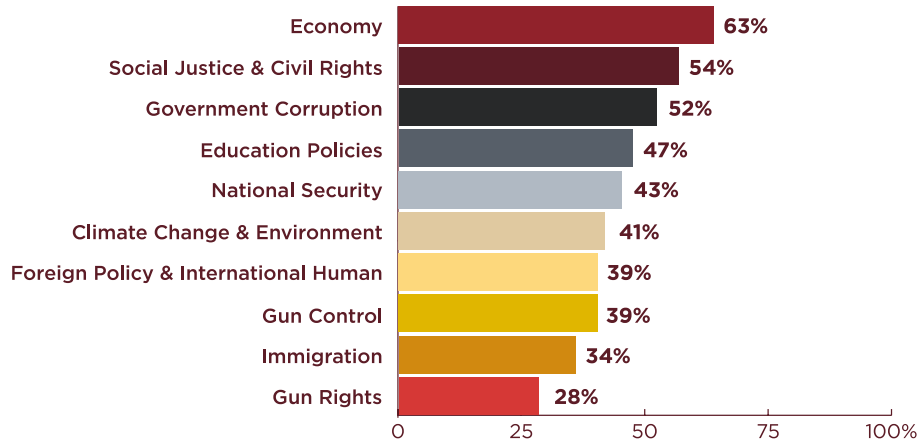


2024 Base: 6,053 (27% of respondents)

A quarter of scholars are completely likely to vote for President in the fall, with the most important issues the economy (63%), social justice (54%), and government corruption (52%).

## CANDIDATE ISSUES

What issues are most important to you when deciding which Presidential candidate to vote for?

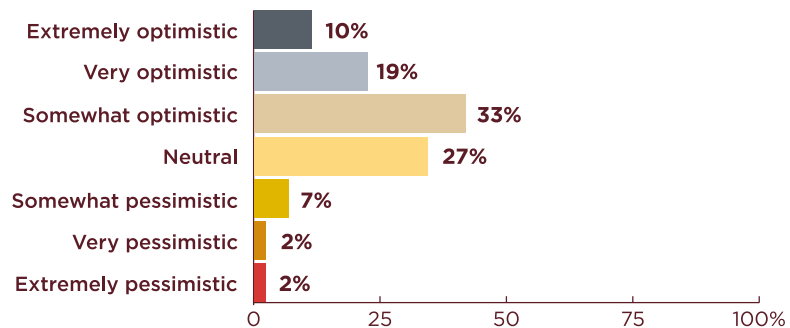


While 41% will decide on a candidate to vote for based on climate change, only 11% are pessimistic about our ability to develop solutions to climate change.

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## ATTITUDES ON ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE

What is your attitude towards developing solutions to climate change?



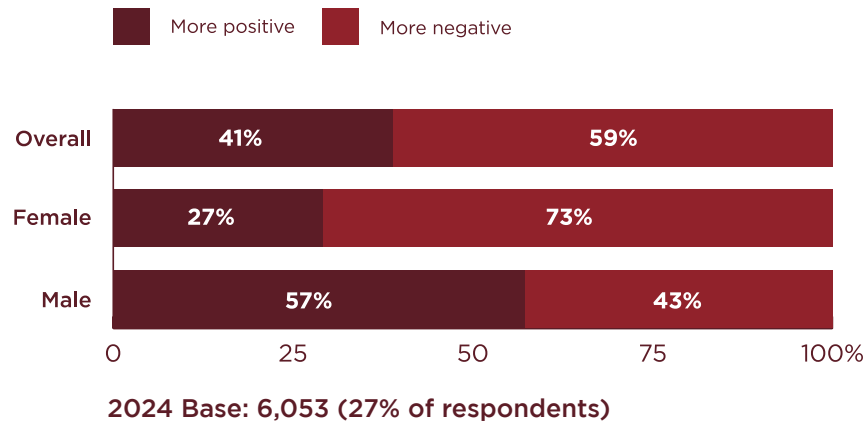


## Artificial Intelligence

Participants had negative views on the impact of Artificial Intelligence. Only 41% believe AI will have a more positive than negative impact on society in the next decade, though this differed dramatically by gender. Only 27% of young women believed this, compared to 57% of young men.

### IMPACT OF AI

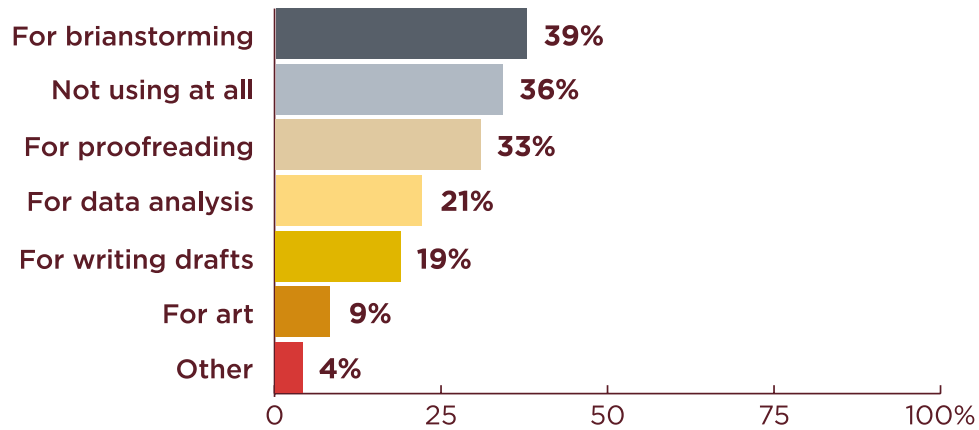
Do you think Artificial Intelligence will have a more positive or negative impact on society in the next ten years?



Almost two thirds (64%) are using AI in work, studies, or everyday life, most typically for brainstorming (39%) or proofreading (33%). The differences by gender are less stark here, except for data analysis (AI used for this by 28% of males, 16% of females).

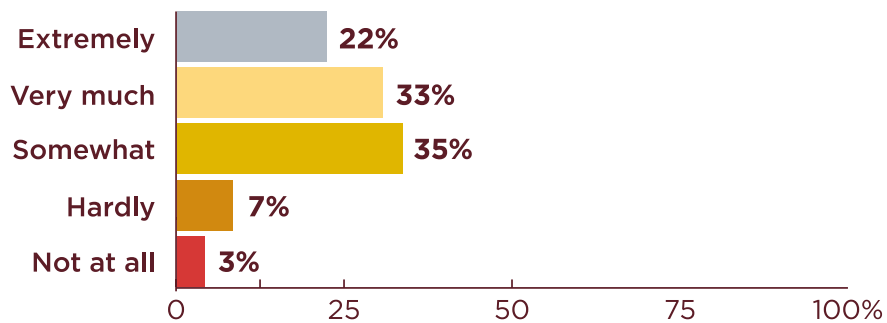
## AI ADOPTION

How are you incorporating AI into your work/studies/everyday life?



## PERSONAL PRIVACY

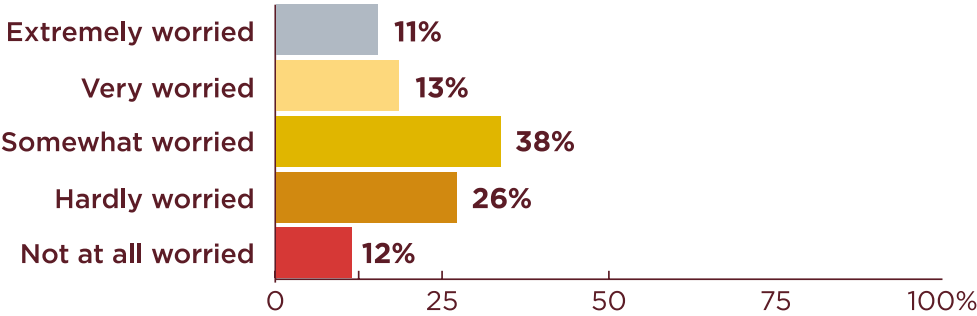
To what degree do you think AI will impact your personal privacy in the 10 years?



A majority think AI will have a significant impact on their personal privacy (55% extremely + very much). Yet only 24% are very or extremely worried that AI will take away jobs they are interested in. More are indifferent to AI (39%) than excited (32%).

# AI IN THE WORKPLACE

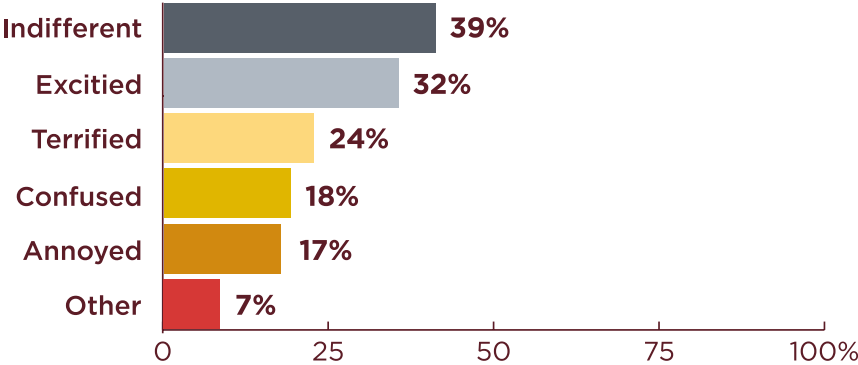
How worried are you that AI will take away jobs that you are interested in?

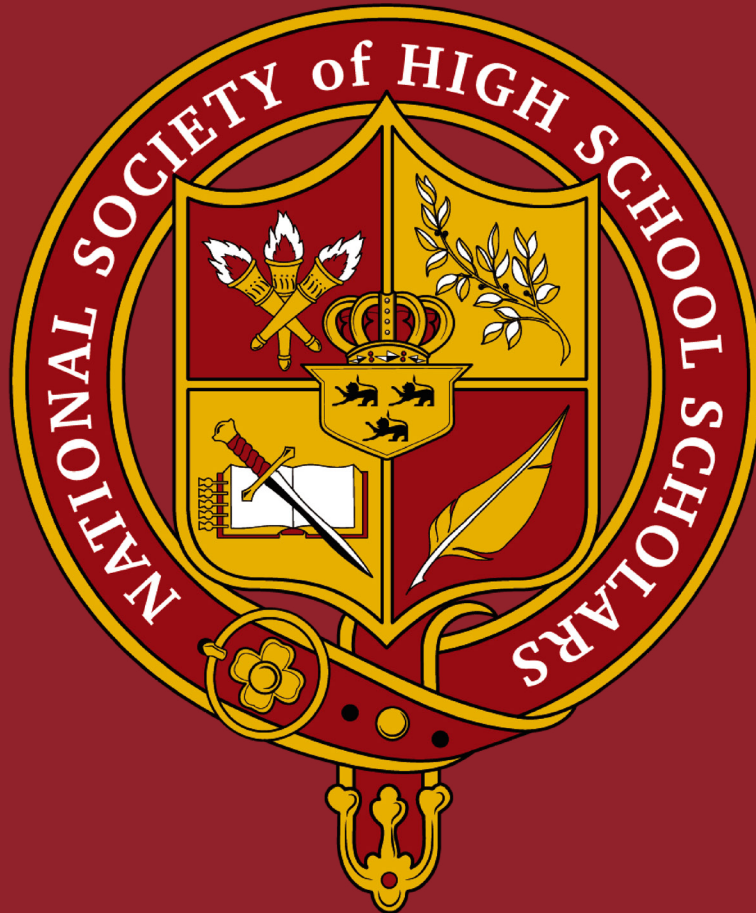


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# ATTITUDES TOWARD AI

How does AI make you feel?





For more information about partnership opportunities with NSHSS, contact [partnerships@nshss.org](mailto:partnerships@nshss.org), or visit [www.nshss.org](http://www.nshss.org).