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An Analysis of the Post-Graduation Plans of Carnegie Mellon University's Undergraduate Class of 2010

Not surprisingly the members of the graduating class of 2010 will begin some impressive careers after graduation. But what exactly do these graduates plan to do? And how did they decide? The post-graduation plans of seniors are important to study, because we can reveal trends in the direction(s) today's students are heading immediately following graduation, and how their major comes into play. Furthermore, by studying how seniors come to a conclusion about their plans, we can better understand who or what has the greatest influence on the decision making process. We used a questionnaire to analyze the plans of graduating seniors as well as the motives behind their decisions. The Career and Professional Development Center is a likely client for this survey, since they can use the findings to better tailor their programming and advising techniques.

The Career and Professional Development Center at Carnegie Mellon already send out surveys each year to students who recently graduated to determine the following: students' employer and job title, salary and geographic location or graduate school and program title and stipend. The data is sorted by college and department and analyzed. Significant differences in trends exist between the different colleges. For example, students in the School of Fine Arts are much more likely than other students to enter the workforce instead of attending graduate school. Therefore, we will likely have to take into account the college of each participant when analyzing post-graduation plans. Our questionnaire differs from that of the Career and Professional Development Center because it is much more in-depth. Our questionnaire incorporates the motivating factors behind seniors' decisions, obstacles faced during the process, and additional ideas that deal with how and why the decisions were made.

Here we will mention the main conclusions we found after conducting analysis. These conclusions include overall statistics on what graduating seniors plan to do and acknowledge whether or not we found that students in different schools tend to have different career plans. If so, these differences will be explained. Also, the conclusions regarding how the students made their decisions such as major influences and major obstacles will be discussed.

The target population is all undergraduate seniors, which there are a total of 1323. To conduct the survey, we needed to contact a sample of undergraduate seniors. We sent the email to 360 undergraduate seniors in different colleges. With a margin of error of 10% and an expected response rate of 25%, we needed 90 respondents. They were chosen by randomly picking a start number by having an excel cell randomly generate a number between one and 10 to determine where to start. We then continued to go through the book in increments of 20. We chose 20 because according to our model, with a sample size of 360, we added extra to account for the graduates that may be listed. We then divided the total students, approximately 10,000 listed in the C-Book, by 500. If the next name we landed on was not a senior, we went down to the next listed senior.

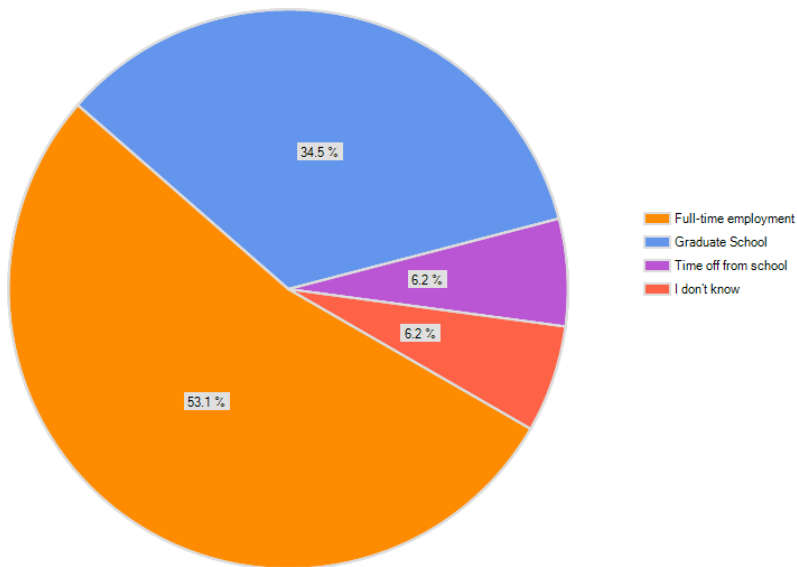
When we sent the email out, 5 of the emails bounced back but we still included these in the 360 and counted these as error responses.

Eight days after sending out the survey, we had a total of 106 complete the entire survey and 146 who started the survey but did not finish. Therefore out of 355, we had a response rate of 30%. This was better than our expected response rate of 25%. We do not have to account for non-response because we met our goal of 90 respondents and those that did not complete the survey need not be accounted for. In addition, we had planned to do post stratification but the responses we received came from a variety of respondents in different schools which were pretty much stratified. Our original stratification percentages were 14% CFA, 28% CIT, 20% HSS, 05% Interdisciplinary, 12% MCS, 11% SCS, 10% Tepper, and according to the survey the responses we received were CFA 13.6%, **CIT** 31.4%, H&SS 16.9%, MCS 14.4%, SCS 13.6%, Tepper 10.2%. Although Interdisciplinary was a category, it was not asked as a college but for primary major where 3.4% of the respondents described their primary major as interdisciplinary. The results came very close to the original percentages.

When asked “Which of the following do you plan to pursue immediately after graduation?”, 51.9% of respondents said they planned to pursue full-time employment but only 35.8% of the respondents have accepted a full time job offer thus far when asked “Which of the following statements apply to you?” From the survey, we learned from the question “Which of the following obstacles have you faced while pursuing post-graduation plans?” the majority, 48.1%, of the respondents attributed their obstacles to a bad economy. We also noticed that salary and location received the highest percent of responses when asked “If you plan to pursue a full-time job, to what degree has each of the following factors influenced you the most? (If you do not plan to pursue a full-time job, please skip this question.)”

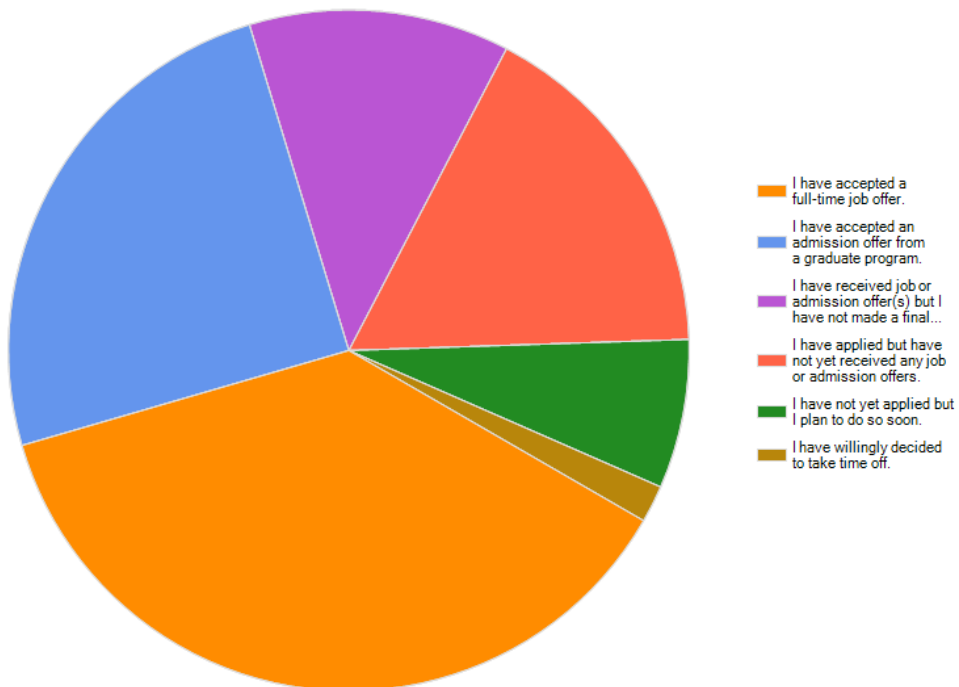
The purpose of this survey was to figure out the post-graduation plans for seniors at Carnegie Mellon University and which factors affected them the most on deciding their future. Through responses from our questionnaire, we were able to get the answers we were looking for. There were both predictable and unpredictable results.

Which of the following do you plan to pursue immediately following graduation?

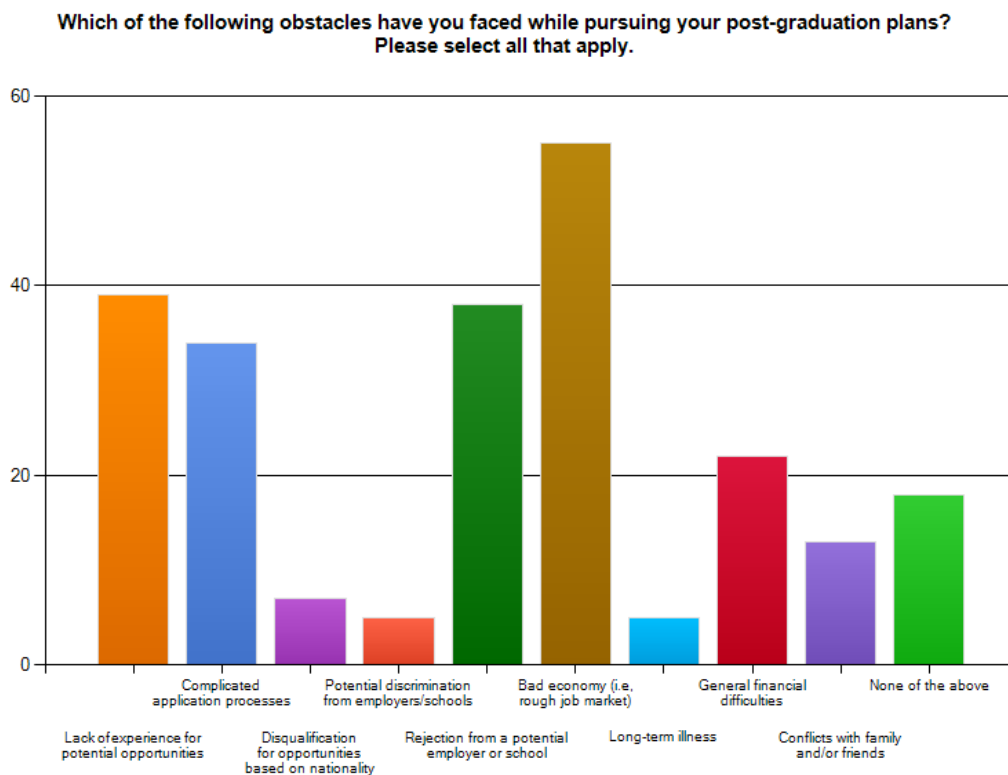


The result for the question “Which of the following do you plan to pursue immediately following graduation?” came out to be that 53.1% of the respondents are pursuing full-time employment, 34.5% are pursuing graduate school, 6.2% are plan to taking time off school and 6.2% do not know what they are going to do. We were able to discover that most of the students were planning to have full-time employment and some for graduate school. There were small portions of students who were planning to take time off from school or do not know what they are going to do.

Which of the following statements apply to you?

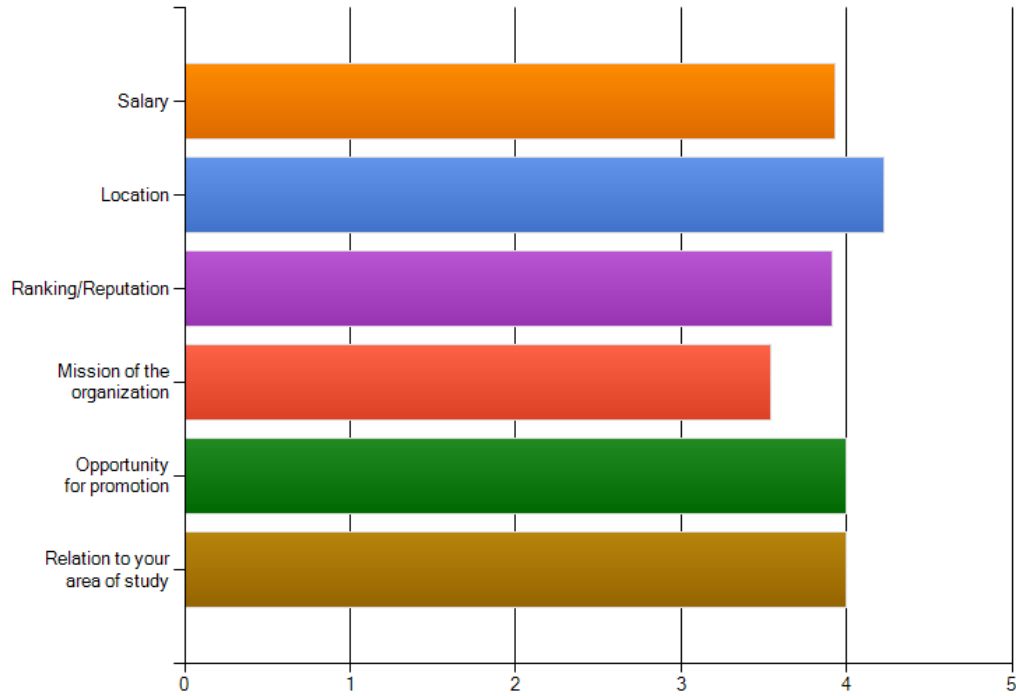


The question that asked respondents what their choices are up to the point they took survey came out to be that 37.2% accepted a full-time job offer, 24.8% accepted an admission offer from a graduate program, 16.8% have applied but have not yet received any job or admission offers, 12.4% received job or admission offer(s) but have not made a final decision yet, 7.1% not yet applied but plan to do so soon and 1.8% decided to take time off. One third of the students already accepted a full-time job offer and one fourth of the students accepted an admission offer from a graduate program. There were some amount of students who have not decided what to do with their offers and few were willingly to take time off.



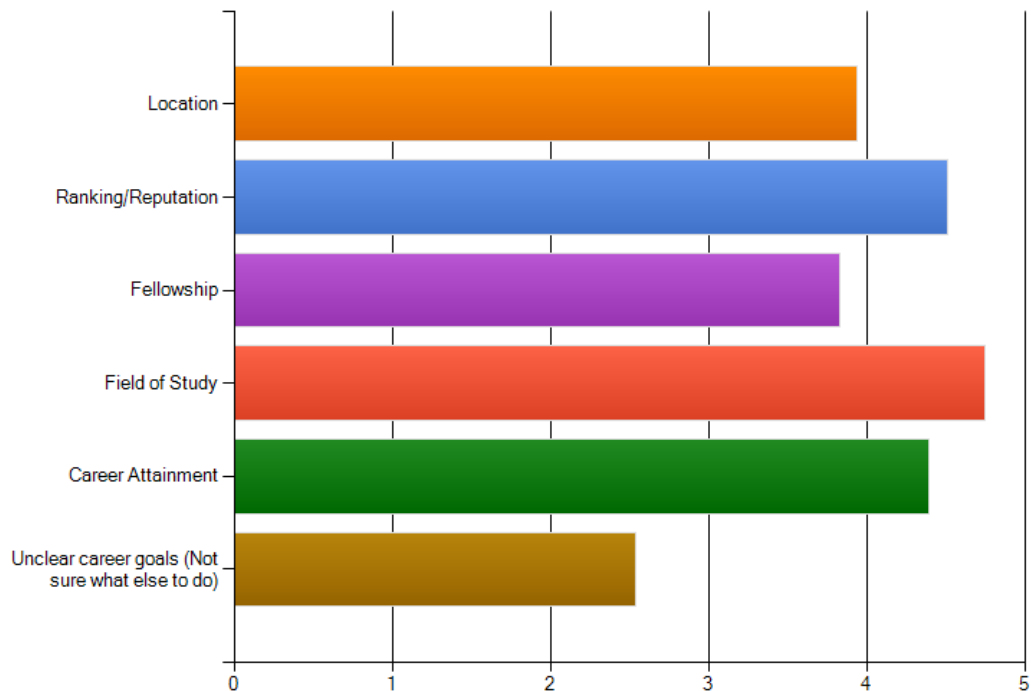
For the question “Which of the following obstacles have you faced while pursuing your post-graduation plans?” respondents were able to select the categories which applied to them. The response percents were 48.7% for bad economy, 34.5% for lack of experience for potential opportunities, 33.6% for rejection from a potential employer or school, 30.1% for complicated application process, 19.5% for general financial difficulties, 15.9% for non of the choices, 11.5% for conflicts with family or friends, 6.2% for disqualification for opportunities based on nationality, 4.4% for both potential discrimination from employer or schools and long-term illness. Most people gave opinion that bad economy was the obstacle that they have face.

If you plan to pursue a full-time job, to what degree has each of the following factors influenced you the most? (If you do not plan to pursue a full-time job, please skip this question.)

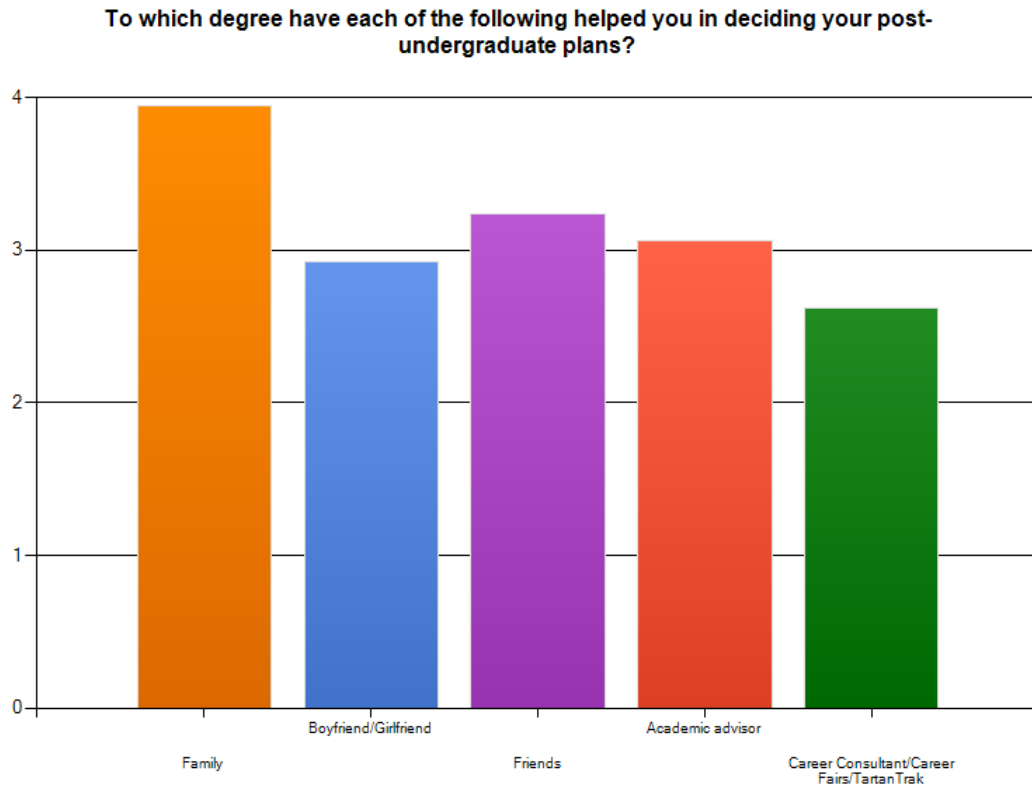


Respondents were able to rate each categories from 1 through 5 for the question “If you plan to pursue a full-time job, to what degree has each of the following factors influenced you the most?” For salary, 3.7% strongly disagreed, 2.5% disagreed, 11.1% neither disagreed nor agreed, 46.9% agreed, 21% strongly agreed and 14.8% did not have opinion on it. For location, 2.5% strongly disagreed, 3.7% disagreed, 7.4% neither disagreed nor agreed, 29.6% agreed, 42% strongly agreed and 14.8% did not have opinion on it. For ranking and reputation, 25% strongly disagreed, 4.9% disagreed, 14.8% neither disagreed nor agreed, 38.3% agreed, 24.7% strongly agreed and 14.8% did not have opinion on it. For mission of the organization, 4.9% strongly disagreed, 8.6% disagreed, 24.7% neither disagreed nor agreed, 29.6% agreed, 17.3% strongly agreed and 14.8% did not have opinion on it. For opportunity for promotion, 2.5% strongly agreed and disagreed, 12.3% neither disagreed nor agreed, 42% agreed, 24.7% strongly agreed and 16% did not have opinion on it. For relation to your area of study, 3.8% strongly disagreed, 5% disagreed, 10% neither disagreed nor agreed, 35% agreed, 31.3% strongly agreed and 15% did not have opinion on it.

If you plan to pursue graduate school, to what degree has each of the following factors influenced you the most? (If you do not plan to pursue graduate school, please skip this question.)



Respondents were able to rate each categories from 1 through 5 for the question “If you plan to pursue graduate school, to what degree has each of the following factors influenced you the most?” For Location, 2.9% strongly disagreed, another 2.9% disagreed, 13% neither disagreed nor agreed, 27.5% agreed, 23.2% strongly agreed and 30.4% did not have opinion on it. For ranking and reputation, 1.4% strongly disagreed, 2.9% neither disagreed nor agreed, 22.9% agreed, 42.9% agreed and 30% did not have opinion on it. For fellowship, 3% strongly disagreed, 4.5% disagreed, 11.9% neither disagreed nor agreed, 22.4% agreed, 19.4% strongly agreed and 38.8% did not have opinion on it. For field of study, 17.4% agreed, 52.2% strongly agreed and 30.4% did not have opinion on it. For career attainment, 2.9% strongly disagreed, 4.3% neither disagreed nor agreed, 22.9% agreed, 40% strongly agreed and 30% did not have opinion on it. For unclear career goals, 15.9% strongly disagreed, 19% disagreed, 6.3% neither disagreed nor agreed, 11.1% agreed, 6.3% strongly agreed and 41.3% did not have opinion on it. Many people strongly agreed that ranking, reputation, field of study and career attainment were the factors which influenced them the most when pursuing graduate school.



For the question “To which degree have each of the following helped you in deciding your post-undergraduate plans?” respondents were able to rate each categories from 1 through 5. For family, 9% disagreed, 18.9% neither disagree nor agree, 39.6% agreed, 31.5% strongly agreed and 0.9% did not have opinion on it. For boyfriend and girlfriend, 18.2% strongly disagreed, 12.7% disagreed, 15.5% neither disagreed nor agreed, 20.9% agreed, 10.9% strongly agreed and 21.8% did not have opinion on it. For friends, 6.4% strongly disagreed, 18.3% disagreed, 30.3% neither disagreed nor agreed, 33% agreed, 11% strongly agreed and 0.9% did not have opinion on it. For academic advisor, 13.6% strongly disagreed, 20.9% disagreed, 23.6% neither disagreed nor agreed, 26.4% agreed, 13.6% strongly agreed and 1.8% did not have opinion on it. For career consultant, 19.3% strongly disagreed, 23.9% disagreed, 30.3% neither disagreed nor agreed, 20.2% agreed, 2.8% strongly agreed and 3.7% did not have opinion on it. Many people agreed that family, friends and academic advisor were the most influencing factors on deciding their post-graduate plans.

We are going to analyze the results more when we close out the survey soon. We are planning to add graphs, statistically analyze the results and see how they answer our research questions in depth.

Our survey is supposed to help us give the Career Center some more insight into how seniors decide their post graduate plans, and how the Career Center can help. The survey did a great job at helping us understand what options are weighed when it comes to accepting a job or graduate school offer; it also helped us to understand the feelings many seniors have when it comes to their post-graduate plans. The survey showed that for seniors who plan on pursuing a full time job after graduation they value the salary they will make, the location of the job and the reputation and rank of the company the most. For seniors who plan on going to graduate school the field of study, rank and reputation of the school, and career attainment are what they value most.

In regards to the feelings of seniors at Carnegie Mellon there were a couple of interesting results. Many of the surveyed people feel that students are competing to have the most impressive post-graduate plans, but at the same time most of the people who took the survey said that they are more concerned with being happy with their post-graduate plans than they are with making money, which doesn't seem very consistent.

About half of the seniors who took the survey have never met with their career consultants to discuss their post-graduate plans. Suggestions for improving the Career Center included hiring ex-human resource employees to give the students first hand information about what employers look for, and offering more connections outside of Pittsburgh students.

References

Career and Professional Development Center, Student Affairs Office, Carnegie Mellon University. (2009) Post-Graduation Survey Results. Retrieved from:
http://www.studentaffairs.cmu.edu/career/students_alumni/post-grad-survey/