

Catching up with the Class of 2024

How economic stress, employer brand, job location, and industry preferences factor into their vision for post-grad life.

May 2024



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After four tumultuous years, the Class of 2024 is ready to graduate. How are they feeling about life after college? What are they looking for in a job? And how is their outlook shaping their application behavior? We surveyed them to find out, and uncovered five key trends:

01

The Class of 2024 is optimistic about their job search, but worried about finances and the economy.

While 67% are confident they can find a job that builds their career, more than half are concerned about covering basic expenses.

02

Although they're willing to relocate, 2024 graduates would like to stay close to family and friends.

Seventy-nine percent are willing to move for the right job, but 86% say being close to family is at least somewhat important to them.

03

Employer reputation plays a key role in graduating seniors' application decisions.

Seventy-five percent read reviews of an employer before applying, and 73% would be more likely to apply after seeing additional behind-the-scenes content from an employer.

04

The Class of 2024 is applying to fewer tech jobs and more government jobs.

About 7.5% of job applications from 2024 graduates on Handshake have been submitted to government roles, compared to 5.5% for the Class of 2023.

05

Students in growing majors are applying to a wider range of roles.

For example, computer science majors in the Class of 2024 are submitting a smaller share of their applications to software developer jobs and a larger share to roles in computer hardware and information security.

How is the Class of 2024 feeling about the future?

With graduation around the corner, this year's seniors have mixed feelings about what comes next. They're optimistic about their job prospects, with the majority saying they're confident they can find a role that allows them to apply their skills and build their career. But finances and the economy are ongoing sources of stress, and many 2024 graduates are anxious about experiencing burnout or struggling to advance as they navigate the transition to full-time work.

"While I'm confident I'll find a job that will take me a step further in my career, I worry about making ends meet. I'm not sure a job that is meaningful and fulfilling will also pay enough for me to achieve my financial goals."

Class of 2024 student

"I think I will find a job that allows me to build the career I'm interested in. However, starting salaries in my field are not very good so I'm nervous about covering bills and living expenses."

Class of 2024 student

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WILL BE PAID BY ADDRESSEE

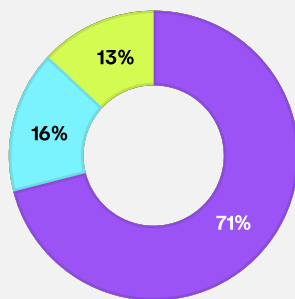
The Class of 2024 is optimistic about finding a job that suits their skills and goals

About 7 in 10 2024 graduates are confident they will find a job or other post-graduate opportunity that will allow them to apply the skills they learned in college and build toward the career they want. For the 30% of soon-to-be grads who have a job or graduate program lined up, this optimism is proving to be justified: almost 9 in 10 say the

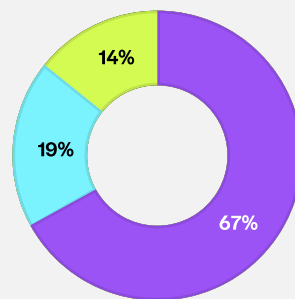
opportunity they've committed to will enable them to apply their skills and build their career, and the majority say they chose this opportunity specifically because it offered a chance to grow and do work they're passionate about. Notably, fewer than 1 in 5 committed simply because they only received one offer.

Students still seeking an opportunity

Agree Neutral Disagree



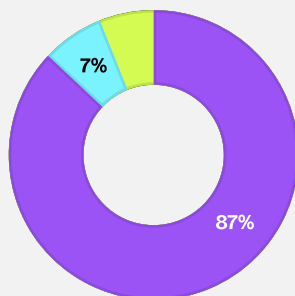
I am confident I can find an opportunity that uses the skills I learned in college



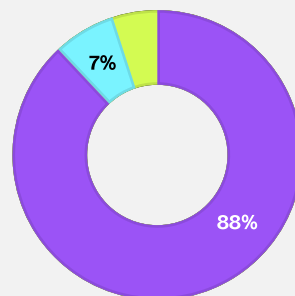
I am confident I can find an opportunity that builds my career

Students who have an opportunity lined up

Agree Neutral Disagree

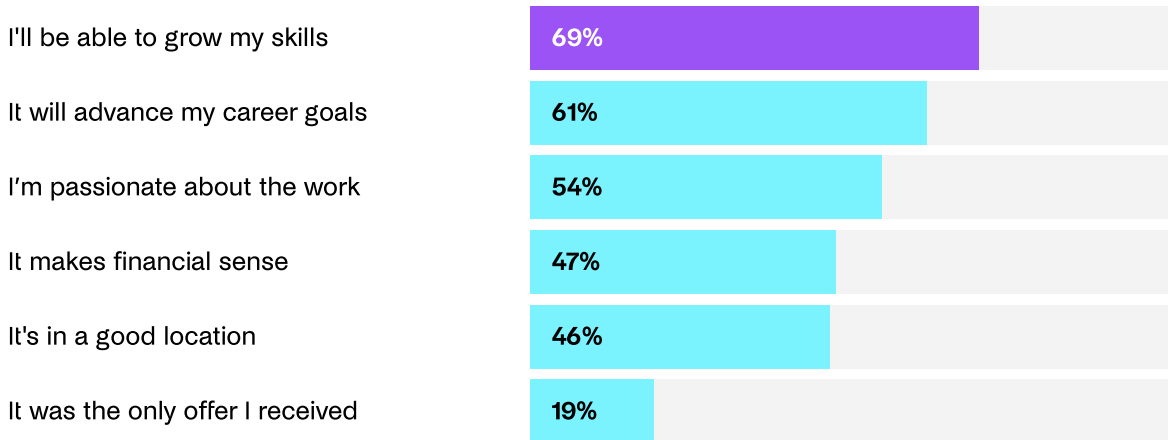


I am confident this opportunity will use the skills I learned in college



I am confident this opportunity will build my career

What are the main reasons you chose to commit to this opportunity?



The Class of 2024 is concerned about economic trends and financial security

Close to 60% of 2024 graduates say the current economic news makes them feel somewhat or very pessimistic—a significant increase from 46% at the end of last year. This pessimism translates to ongoing stress about their financial future. More than half of Class of 2024 students say they're worried about covering basic expenses once they enter the workforce, and more than a third are worried they won't be able to pay down their student loans.

“Even though I am very conservative with my money, I worry about the future. I don't want to be stuck paying off my student loans for the rest of my life. I worry about being able to provide for myself, let alone starting a family one day.”

Class of 2024 student

Sentiment

37%

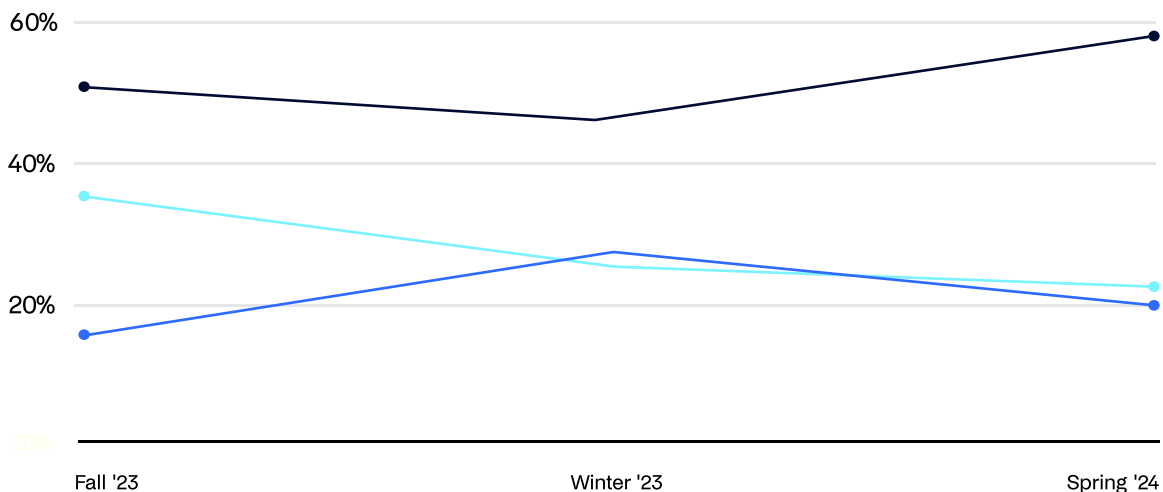
worry about paying down
their student loans

59%

worry about covering
basic expenses

The current economic news makes me feel _____.

● Optimistic ● Neutral ● Pessimistic



"The cost of living is so high right now and salaries seem so low. I have so much I want to save for, but I'm looking at starting salaries of \$40,000 a year, which means half my salary would go to my rent. What about health insurance, car insurance, utilities, student loans? Everything seems so expensive and working eight hours a day isn't enough."

Class of 2024 student

Many 2024 graduates are apprehensive about the transition to the workforce

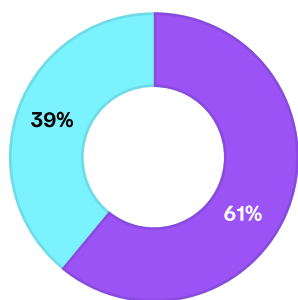
Despite their optimism about finding a job that fits their skills and goals, many of this year's seniors are worried about what their day-to-day work life will look like. Well over half are concerned about feeling burned out, and a majority worry they won't enjoy their work or will struggle to advance. Additionally, more than a third are worried about feeling lonely or isolated at work.

"I am worried that after all the work I have put into my degree, I will end up dealing with burnout or not enjoying my work as much as I thought I would."

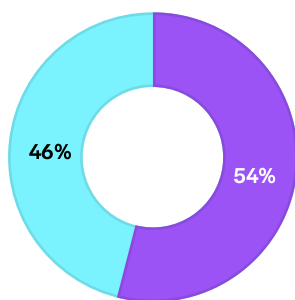
Class of 2024 student

When you think about starting your career, are you worried about the following?

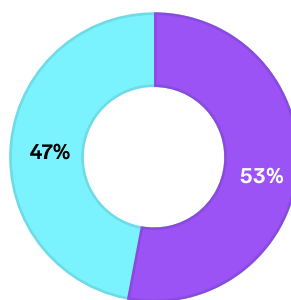
● Yes ● No



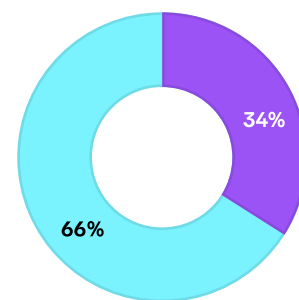
Experiencing burnout



Not enjoying my work



Struggling to advance



Being lonely at work

What is the Class of 2024 looking for in a job?

This year's graduates are considering a range of factors in their job search. Not surprisingly, job stability continues to be one of their most important considerations, and a majority are more likely to apply to a job that offers a high salary and schedule flexibility. But for this class, two other factors stand out. The first is job location, particularly whether a job allows them to live near family and friends. The second is employer reputation, including whether an employer has demonstrated—through direct interaction, public-facing content, or reviews—that they're committed to treating employees well and fostering a positive work culture.

"It is highly unlikely I will get a job that allows me to fully support myself, so I need to live at home to start. I also do not want to leave my community of people whom I love and trust, especially when I know they need me around."

Class of 2024 student

"I tend to lean toward companies that are transparent and share their practices through various platforms. This tells me they're willing to showcase their work culture and environment to appeal to potential employees."

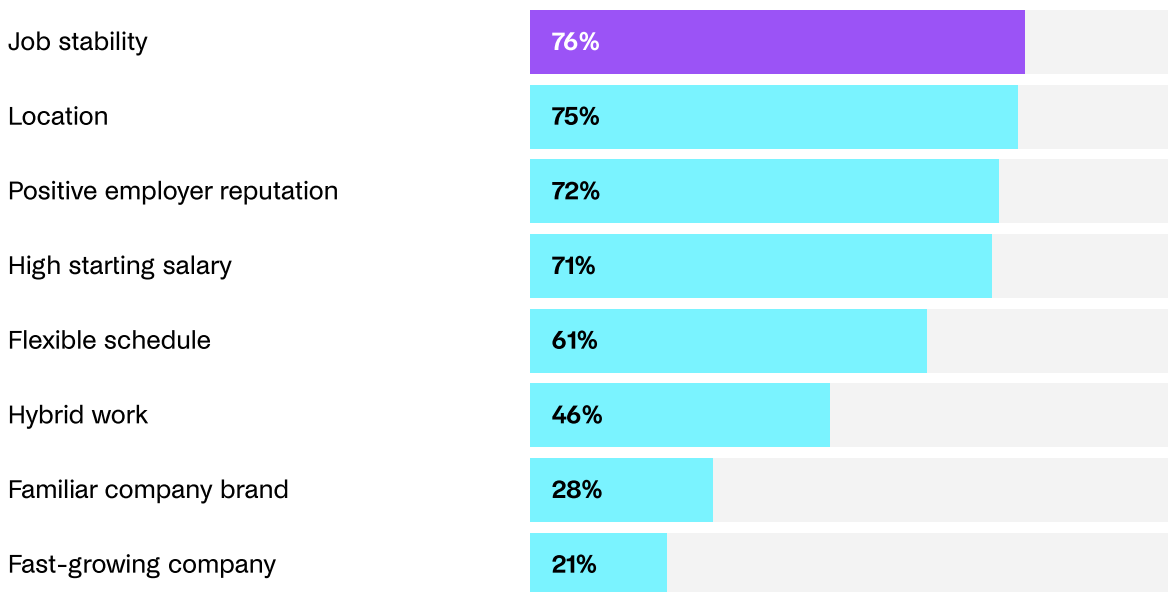
Class of 2024 student

CLASS OF 2024

Stability, location, and employer reputation are top factors when considering a job

Job stability continues to be the biggest single factor influencing new grads' application decisions, with 76% saying they'd be more likely to apply to a job that feels secure. For the Class of 2024, though, three other factors are almost as important—salary, job location, and whether the company has a positive reputation as an employer.

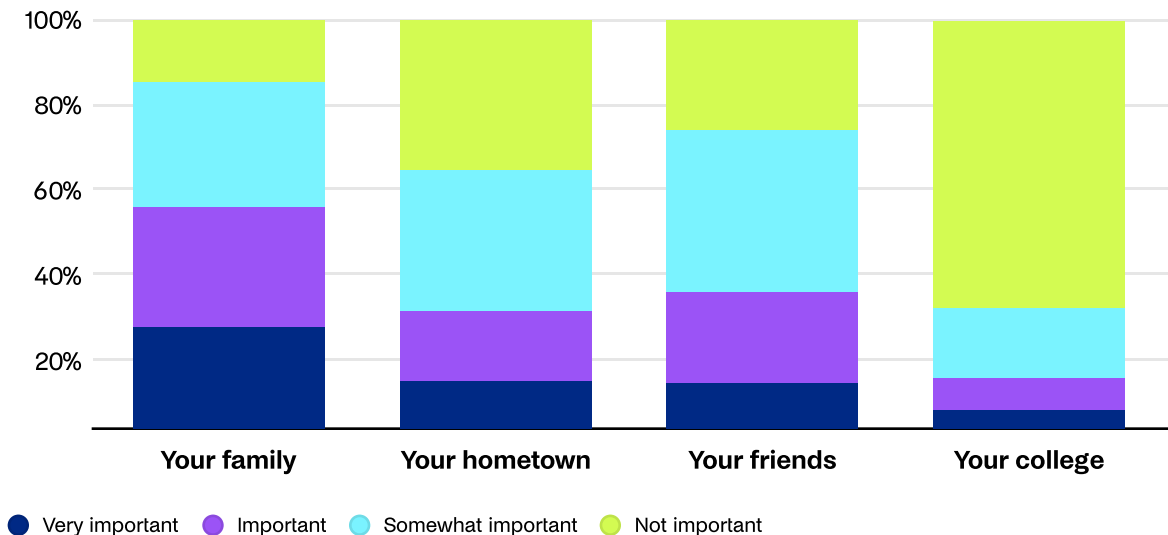
Which of these factors make you more likely to apply to a job?



The Class of 2024 is willing to relocate, but wants to be close to family and friends

Seventy-nine percent of 2024 graduates say they'd be willing to relocate for the right job, and less than a third say it's important to them to stay close to their college or university. However, the majority of new grads would prefer to live and work close to their friends, family, and hometown if possible. In particular, more than 80% say being close to family is at least somewhat important to them.

How important is it that your next job allows you to live close to the following?



"For the right job and opportunity, I would be willing to move. But I would prefer to live somewhat close to my family and friends, as those relationships are very important to me."

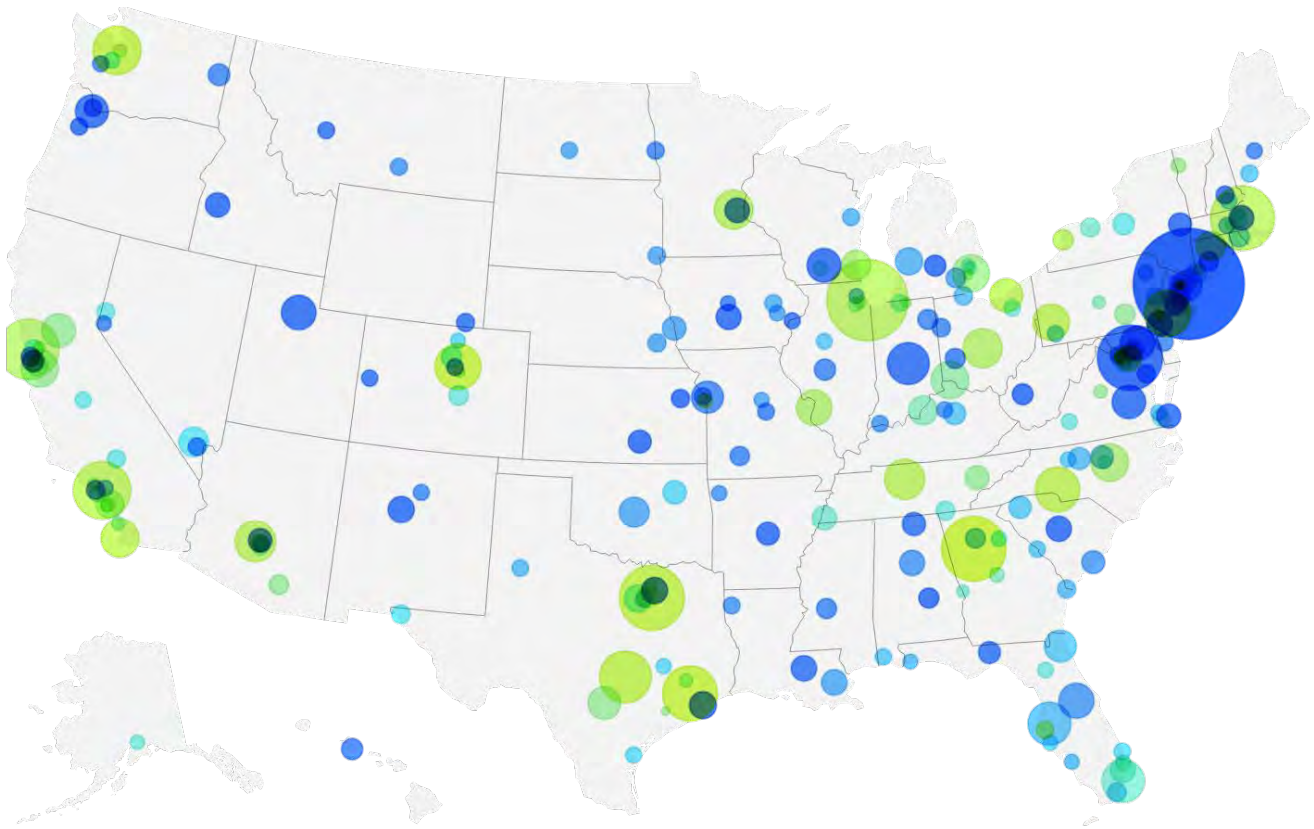
Class of 2024 student

East coast hubs attract more applicants, while major California cities decline

New York City is the most popular destination for Class of 2024 applicants, with almost 10% of total applications from this class going to jobs in the Big Apple—up from a little over 8% for the Class of 2023. Other cities seeing gains with this year’s graduates include Washington, DC and Salt Lake City, UT. Meanwhile, the share of applications submitted to metro centers in California and Texas has dropped significantly.

Which cities are trending with the class of 2024?

Year-over-year change in application share (pp)



Employer reputation plays a key role in application decisions

General brand awareness is a relatively minor factor in new grads' application decisions, with only 28% saying they're more likely to apply to a job if they're familiar with the company's brand. But a company's reputation as an employer is another story. Seventy-five percent of 2024 graduates prefer to read reviews from current and former employees before applying to a job, and a majority are more likely to apply if they have additional insight into the employer's culture and values—whether through direct experience or via content such as employer messages or videos.

"I definitely would apply to a job if I had a positive prior experience with the company. That would help me feel comfortable, knowing that I'd be in a place I want to be and where I would grow as a person and in my career."

Class of 2024 student

94%

would consider applying in the future if they had a positive experience with an employer

75%

read reviews of an employer before applying to a job

73%

are more likely to apply to a job after seeing employer content

Which jobs is the Class of 2024 applying to?

This year's seniors know they're facing a tight job market, especially in certain industries, and it's clear they want to pursue as many options as possible. The average Class of 2024 student has applied to more than 21 jobs on Handshake since the start of the fall recruiting season, up from 14 for the Class of 2023 at this time last year. They're also applying to a wider range of industries and job roles, shifting some of their applications away from competitive spaces like tech and toward industries like government and manufacturing.

"I received an offer to work for a federal agency while in college. After graduating, I expect to be converted permanently with a raise. Working for the federal government will open doors for me, and I'm extremely thankful where I don't have to worry about being laid off."

Class of 2024 student

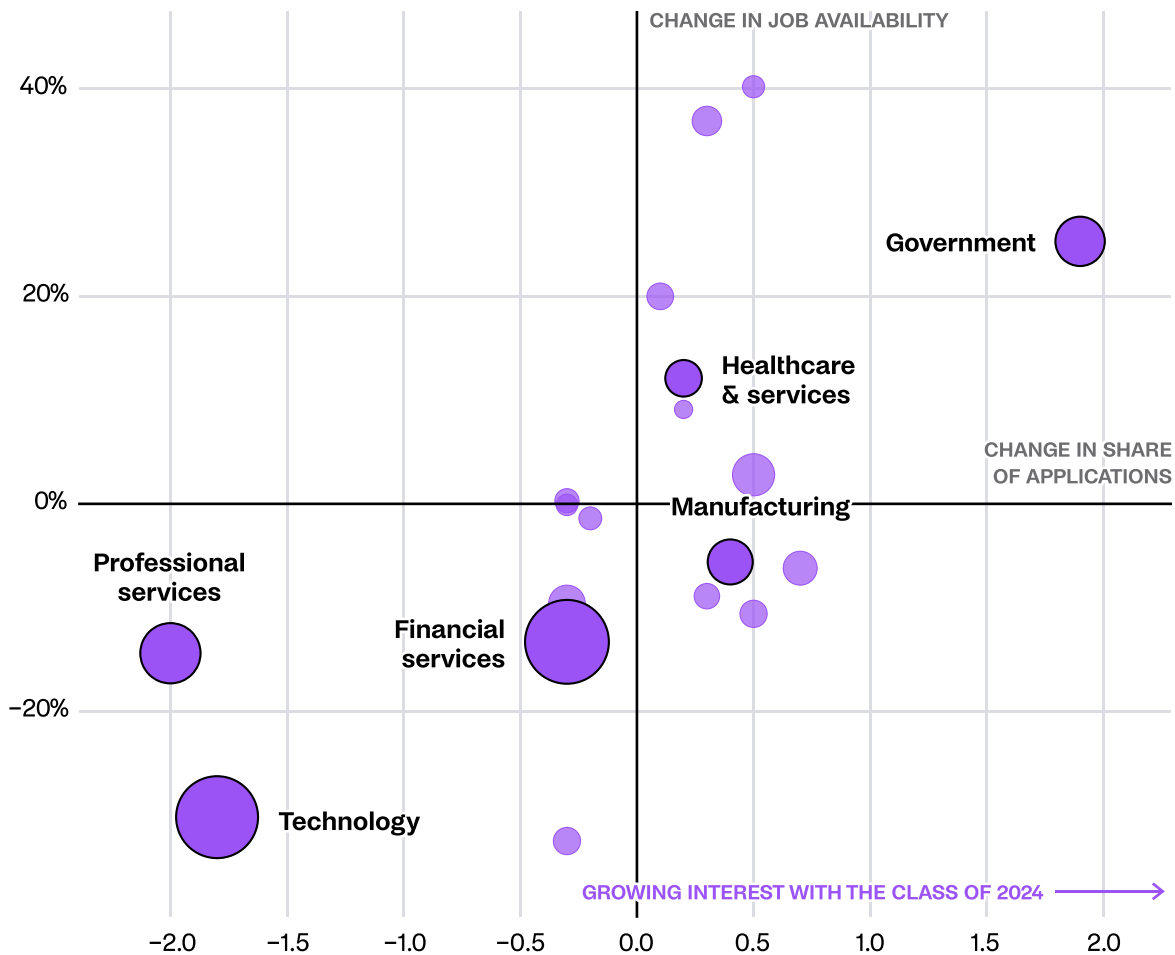
OPEN TO WORK



The Class of 2024 is less drawn to the tech industry and more interested in government

As hiring slows in technology and professional services, the Class of 2024 is shifting their applications toward other industries. Government is the clearest winner from this trend—to date, about 7.4% of job applications from 2024 graduates on Handshake have been submitted to government roles, compared to 5.5% for the Class of 2023. Manufacturing is also seeing increased interest, along with construction, healthcare, agriculture, and education.

Change in job availability and application share by industry, Class of 2024 vs. Class of 2023



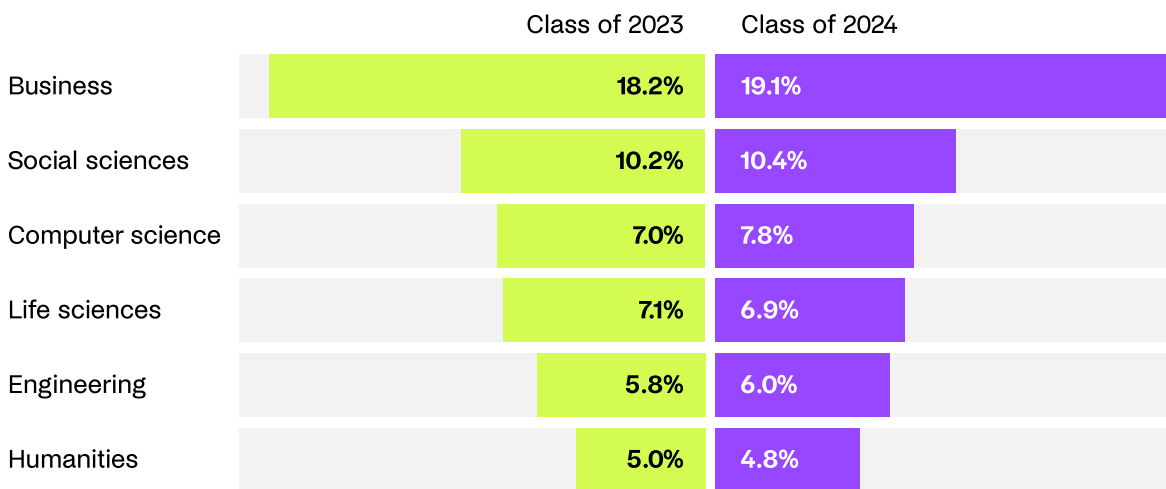
Based on an analysis of full-time job roles for applications created by users in their respective senior years (from August to March)

Students in growing majors are applying to a wider range of roles

The share of graduates majoring in computer science and business increased significantly between the Class of 2023 and the Class of 2024. Students in these majors are also beginning to cast a wider net in their job search, and are increasingly applying to roles that fall outside the most common or expected track for their field of study.

For example, computer science graduates are submitting a smaller percentage of their applications to software engineering roles, while roles in areas like information security and computer hardware are attracting more interest. Similarly, this year's business graduates are less likely to apply to consulting roles and more likely to seek out positions in customer success, marketing, and analytics.

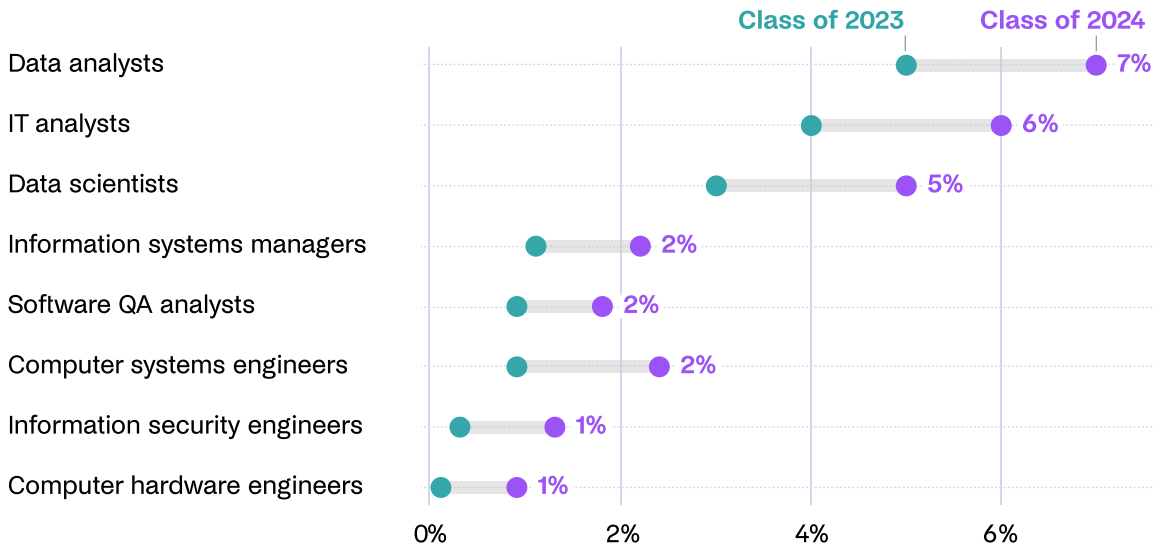
Share of graduating students in top majors, Class of 2023 vs. Class of 2024



Application trends

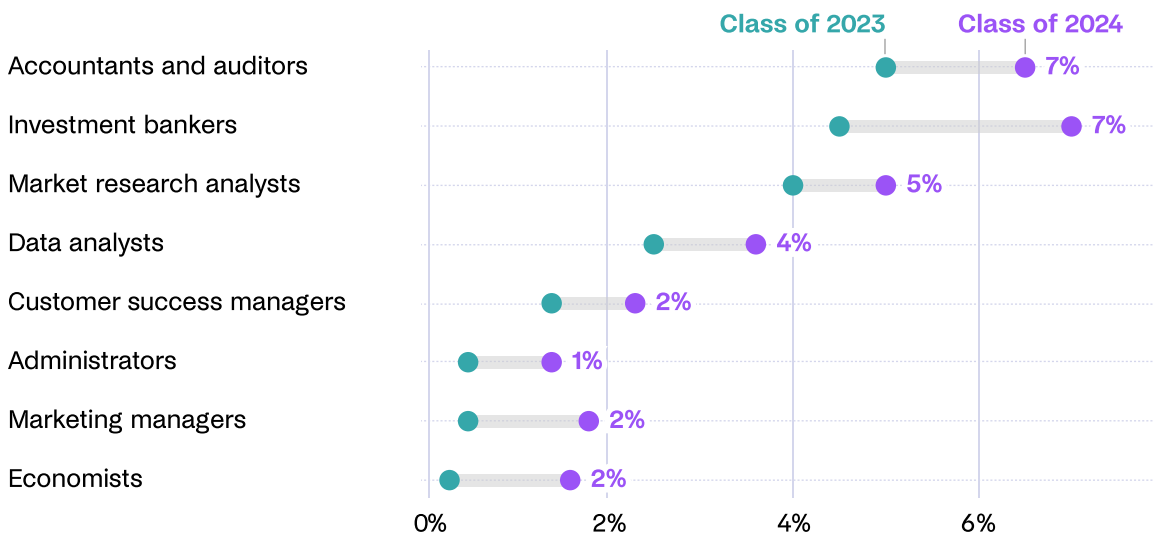
Trending job roles for computer science graduates

Percent of total applications from computer science majors submitted to each role



Trending job roles for business graduates

Percent of total applications from business majors submitted to each role

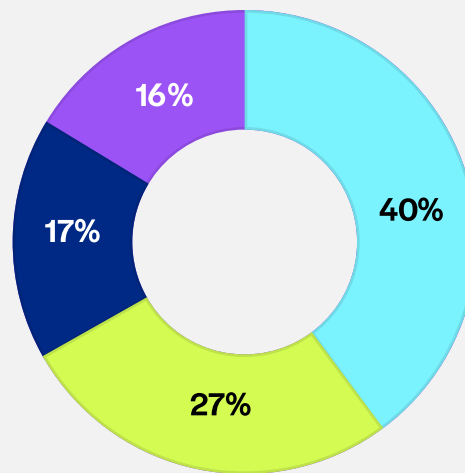


Long term, many 2024 grads would like to work for themselves

Almost three quarters of this year's graduates are interested in pursuing entrepreneurship at some point in their career. Of those considering this path, the majority are drawn to investing or starting a small business, while about a third would want to work as influencers or found high-growth companies.

How interested are you in entrepreneurship (e.g., freelancing or starting your own business?)

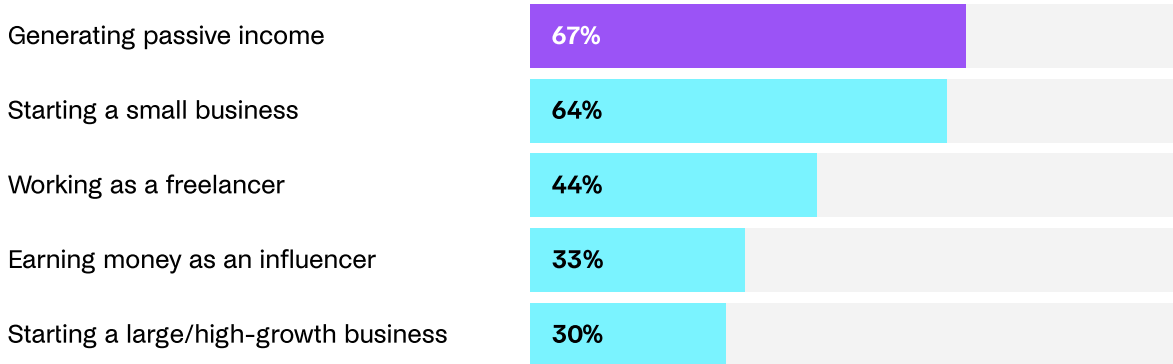
● Very interested ● Interested
● Somewhat interested ● Not interested



"I believe being your own boss is the ultimate goal. I have a lot of family members who run their own businesses and I like the idea of creating something unique and making something successful from what I'm passionate about."

Class of 2024 student

Which entrepreneurship opportunities would you want to pursue?



“I have hobbies that are completely different from my current degree, and exploring them as a way to generate another stream of income has always interested me.”

Class of 2024 student

The Class of 2024 is driven to succeed

This year's graduates may be anxious about the future, but they're as determined as ever to launch successful, rewarding careers. They're clear on their priorities—stability, location, and an employer's reputation as a great place to work. They're investing unprecedented energy in the job search, submitting more applications than previous classes and exploring a wider range of roles across industries. While their next steps might feel uncertain, one thing is for sure: the Class of 2024 is ready to make the most of every opportunity that comes their way.



Methodology

Student sentiment surveys

Between March 11-24, 2024, Handshake randomly invited students across the platform to participate in an online survey. After cleaning, 2,687 students planning to graduate with bachelor's degrees in 2024, from 616 institutions, completed the survey.

Survey weighting

In order to provide a more representative snapshot of student sentiment across four-year college students in the US, survey responses were weighted by gender, race and ethnicity, and selectivity using institutional enrollment numbers from federal NCES datasets.

Platform data

To determine year-over-year applications trends, Handshake tabulated full-time job applications created by Handshake users in their respective senior years (from August to March). Application share was calculated by dividing the total number of applications submitted to a given industry, location, and job role by all applications submitted by each senior class cohort. Job availability was drawn from the change in the total number of jobs applied to by each senior class cohort.



About Handshake

Handshake's mission is to democratize access to opportunity, and Handshake is the best place to start or accelerate a career—no connections, experience, or luck required. Our community includes 15M+ students and young alumni from 1,500+ educational institutions, including four-year colleges, community colleges, boot camps, and 300+ minority-serving institutions. We connect emerging talent with 900K+ employers—from Fortune 500 companies to thousands of public school districts, healthcare systems, nonprofits, and more. Handshake is headquartered in San Francisco with offices in Denver, New York, London, and Berlin and teammates working globally.

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