



## Meet Generation Z

Northeastern University's fourth national Innovation Imperative survey on higher education and the economy presents a portrait of Generation Z – their ideas, expectations, and hopes regarding work, the college experience, society and culture, and the role of technology in their lives.

### KEY FINDINGS

***Generation Z are self-starters with a strong desire to work for themselves, learn about entrepreneurship, and design their own programs of study in college.***

- Just under two-thirds (63%) say it is important for colleges to teach students about entrepreneurship, including how to start a business.
- Nearly three-fourths (72%) believe that colleges should allow students to design their own course of study or major.
- More than 4-in-10 (42%) expect to work for themselves in their career, nearly four times higher than the actual percentage of self-employed Americans<sup>1</sup>.
  - Minorities, particularly African-Americans (60%) and Hispanics (59%), are most likely to expect to work for themselves later in life.
  - Teens attending two-year colleges are more likely to expect to work for themselves than those attending four-year colleges (53% and 35%, respectively).

***While highly self-directed, Gen Z is also certain about the importance of higher education to achieve their goals.***

- 8-in-10 (81%) say college is very or extremely important to having the career they want.
  - Gen Z holds this view more strongly than the general public (74% in 2012 poll).
- Two-thirds (65%) believe college is worthwhile and that the benefits will outweigh the costs.
  - This breaks down based on family income: 73% of teens from families with an estimated income of \$100K or more believe the costs are worth it, compared to just 43% of teens from families with an estimated income of less than \$15K.

***At the same time, Generation Z has concerns about their financial futures, including the cost of college.***

- More than two-thirds (67%) are concerned about being able to afford college.
  - Hispanic teens, at 76%, express the most concern with college affordability.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2012/tables/12s0604.pdf> and <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2012/tables/12s0604.pdf>, 2010.

- There are some regional differences in concerns about college affordability: more than three-quarters (79%) of teens living in the Northeast are worried about being able to afford college, compared to just 63% of teens from both the South and West.
- Gen Z appears particularly wary of student loan debt: a quarter say they don't think any debt at all is manageable and 44% say they could only handle debt payments of \$100/month.
- Financial worries extend beyond college, as 64% say they are concerned about being able to get a job and 60% express concerns about having enough money.

***This financial anxiety is coupled with a strong desire to become more financially educated and obtain real-world experience.***

- Teaching students practical skills like financial planning and saving for the future is important to a great majority of Gen Z (85%); half (51%) rate it extremely important.
- A vast majority, 8-in-10 (79%), believe college should include some form of professional experience, such as internships with employers.

***Contrary to the prevailing narrative about today's teenagers, the survey revealed somewhat modest enthusiasm for technology, particularly its use within higher education.***

- Only 52% said an online degree will be recognized and accepted the same as a traditional college degree in the near future, compared to 67% of young professionals in 2012.
- Similarly, only 57% of Gen Z said it's important for colleges to provide more ways to attend classes, including online, compared to 64% in the 2012 survey.

***In addition, Gen Z still values the importance of interpersonal interaction.***

- Only 15% say they prefer to interact with their friends via social media rather than in person.
- Less than 4-in-10 (38%) of Generation Z say they make most of their purchases online.
- An alarming majority, 6-in-10 (61%), know people that have been cyberbullied or stalked online.

***Generation Z is highly progressive when it comes to social policy, with strong support for universal healthcare, relaxed immigration laws, and equal rights for all people, regardless of sexual orientation.***

- A decisive majority – nearly 3-in-4 – contend that everyone should have the legal right to marry, regardless of sexual orientation (73%).
- Gen Zers, particularly those likely to vote and females, also support equal rights for transgender people (74% overall, 85% among those likely to vote, 80% among females).
- 55% of Gen Z and 64% of those likely to vote believe everyone should have the right to become a U.S. citizen, regardless of place of birth and how they came to the country.
  - Hispanic (70%) and African-American (57%) teens are more likely to say everyone should have the right to become a U.S. citizen than are Caucasian teens (47%).
- Nearly two-thirds (64%) say that healthcare should be free for everyone.
  - Caucasian teens (55%) are least likely to support universal healthcare, while Hispanic and African-American teens are more likely to do so (77% and 74%, respectively).
  - Democratic teens agree that healthcare should be free for everyone significantly more than Republican teens do, at 81% compared to just 34%, respectively.

The poll was conducted Oct. 8 – 23, 2014 and included telephone and online surveys with 1,015 teenagers (16- to 19-year-olds).