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Americans Rank A Google Internship Over A Harvard Degree



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Education



The idea of an internship at Google resonates with Americans in ways far beyond the hit comedic ... [+]

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When asked what they believe would be most helpful for a high school graduate to launch a career, Americans overwhelmingly recommend an internship at Google (60%) over a degree from Harvard (40%). This latest finding from research I led at Kaplan (conducted by QuestResearch Group) is based on a survey of 2,000 U.S. adults conducted in December. It says an awful lot about the state of affairs in higher education today.

For many, it will be hard to fathom that an internship from a highly admired global company wins out over a full degree from a world-renowned university. But it comes as no surprise when viewed through the lens of the many public opinion studies done on higher education over the past several years. I've written [article](#) after [article](#) after [article](#) about this. Here's the summary:

- The [#1 reason Americans value higher education](#) is *to get a good job*.
- There are very few believers in the work readiness of college graduates. Only [13% of U.S. adults](#), [11% of C-level executives](#) and [6% of college and university trustees](#) strongly agree with statements about the work readiness of graduates.
- The poor perceptions about college graduates' work readiness is backed up by real evidence as this current generation of college students is [the least working in U.S. history](#) and [less than 1/3 of grads had a job or internship during college where they were able to apply what they were learning in the classroom](#).
- These factors, along with growing concerns about the affordability of higher education, have led to a precipitous decline in [young Americans' views about the importance of college](#) which has dropped by almost 50% in just six years.

In short, Americans are seeing more value in work experience and on-the-job training and less value in traditional higher education. They have good reasons behind these views. And on top of it all, there is ample evidence that the future of work and careers will require a constant process of life-long education and training in various forms – putting even more pressure on the traditional four-year degree model.

The recently conducted research provided some additional insights and nuances that are important to note. Among those who are parents, when asked about what they prefer for their own child, the answers were split with 52% preferring a Google internship versus 48% a Harvard degree. (With an N of 642 parents who have children in the household, this was not a significant difference.) While parents with children are less likely to prefer a Google internship compared to the overall general population, half still chose it over a Harvard degree.

In a separate survey fielded in mid-November (N of 2,000 U.S. adults), a slightly different question was asked: "If you had \$50,000 to invest in helping your child get a good job, how would you rather spend it?" Two-thirds would have their child do an internship at Google for one year (68%) rather than attend Harvard for one year (32%). This question compared a year's experience at each rather than a full degree at Harvard which is most likely why the results are more strongly in favor of the Google internship. But the interesting insight here is that it suggests many parents are willing to *invest* in an internship experience. This opens a whole new dimension to the talent development marketplace where one can imagine a world where employers and education partners team up to provide tuition-based internship programs.

So, what does it mean for higher education when Americans chose an internship over a degree from the top-ranked university in the country? Many might see it as a major threat to higher education. But it's also a tremendous opportunity. It's an opportunity to create an innovative

fusion between education and work where higher education remains relevant but in very different forms. It's an opportunity for colleges and universities to go beyond the accredited degree model and expand into the rapidly growing space of non-degree, certificate and certification training. And it opens the possibility of new partnership models between employers and universities that produce interesting variants of apprenticeships, co-ops, and internships.

There are two ways higher education can react to the rapidly declining views of the importance of college. One is to ignore it, hoping it's just a public opinion cycle that will swing back. The other is to view it as a mandate and opportunity for change to become even more relevant than ever before to a wider group of students. Despite higher education's historic reluctance to change, the first option of staying the course is by far the more risky one. Few signals tell us that more clearly than when Americans vote for internships over degrees.

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