

# The 2019 Cengage STUDENT OPPORTUNITY INDEX

A comprehensive assessment  
of opportunity for near  
and recent graduates.





# Welcome to the 2019 Cengage Student Opportunity Index

Supporting success in class and beyond means understanding the landscape your students are entering post-graduation. That's why we partnered with [Wakefield Research](#) to develop the first-annual **Cengage Student Opportunity Index**, the source for year-over-year assessment of opportunity for near and recent graduates. This study measures 17 key indicators across four categories—employment, economic, social and personal well-being—using existing public data and a survey of 2,500 recent and upcoming graduates.

## Methodology

The Cengage Student Opportunity Index is calculated from primary and secondary data obtained from an online survey conducted by Wakefield Research among 2,500 recent or near college graduates—defined as those who graduated in the past 12 months or who will graduate in the next 12 months. The survey was fielded between January 18 and February 1, 2019, within each of the following majors: business, biological sciences, healthcare, humanities and social sciences and STEM. The margin of error for this study among the total sample is +/- 2.0 percentage points, calculated at the 95 percent confidence level.

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# National Results

## Economic Indicators

The economic situation college graduates are entering is strong—but there are unique challenges.



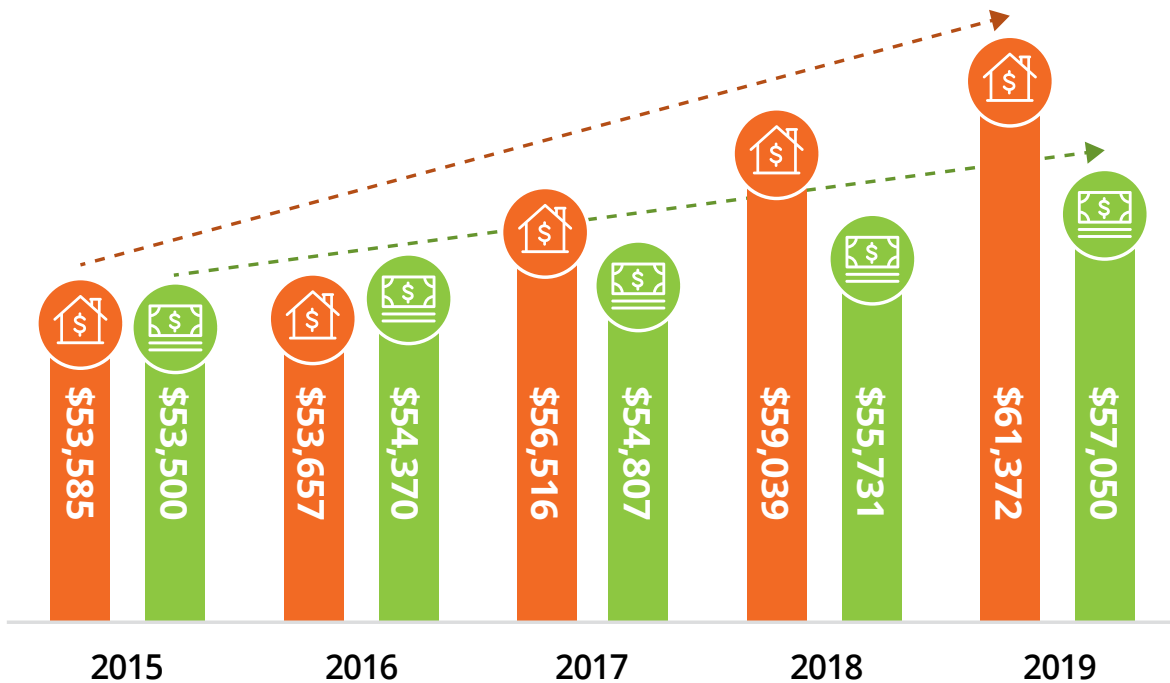
### Household Income

Median household income has steadily risen



### GDP per Capita

GDP has also steadily grown



### DID YOU KNOW?

Over the past 10 years, college prices have increased **45%**.  
For more facts on affordability in higher education, [check out our infographic](#).



# National Results

## Economic Indicators



### Student Debt

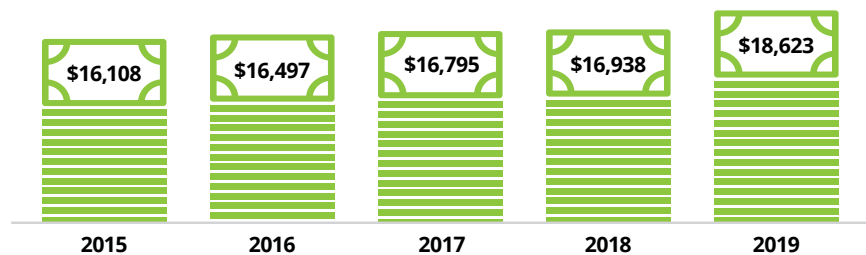
**57%**

of graduates with loan debt said the economic outlook is positive, compared to the

**38%**

of students without debt.

### AVERAGE STUDENT LOAN DEBT



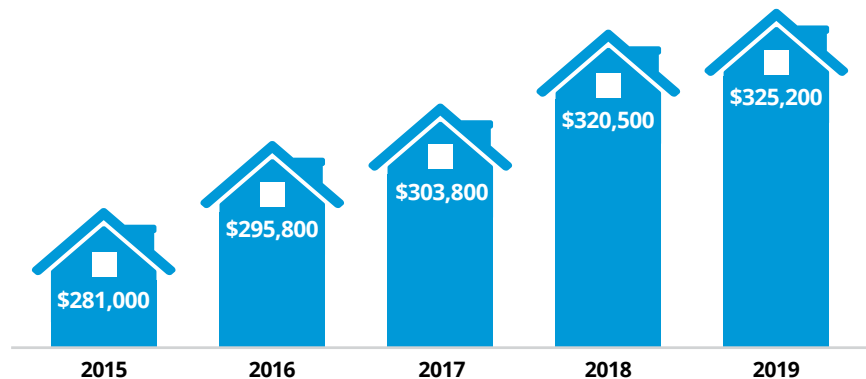
**71%**

of near and recent graduates think the country's economic outlook is the same or better than when they first began college. Yet,

**less than half**

believe the U.S. economy is better off than when they began college.

### MEDIAN COST OF A NEW HOME



### Economic Indicators at a Glance

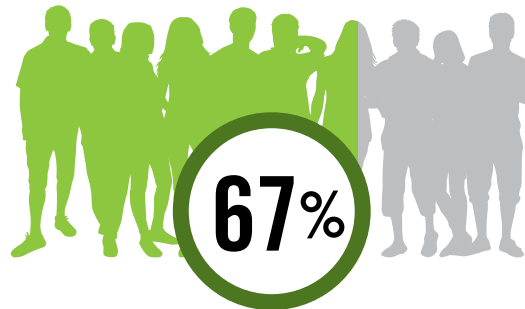
While the economic landscape is improving—a trend illustrated by an increasing GDP and household income—rising student debt levels and housing costs prove challenging for near and recent graduates.



# National Results

## Employment Indicators

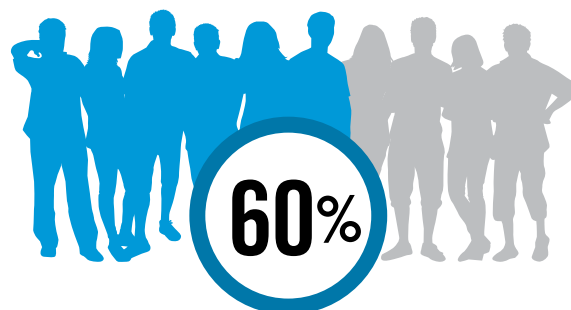
Near and recent graduates are optimistic about job opportunities.



believe their salary expectations will be met within one year of graduating.



expect to land a job related to their educational background within six months of graduating.



of graduates will actually go on to work in a job related to their education background.



# National Results

## Employment Indicators



### Employment Opportunities

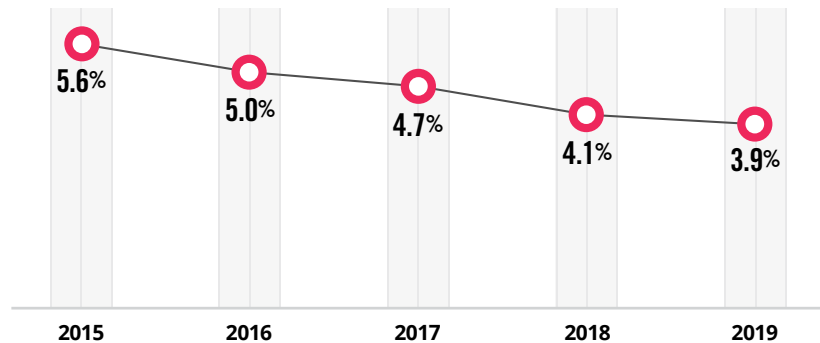
Near and recent graduates are confident that opportunities in their field of study will grow in the next two years. Out of all majors, **Humanities and Social Sciences** reported feeling the most insecure about employment opportunity.



### Interactive Quiz

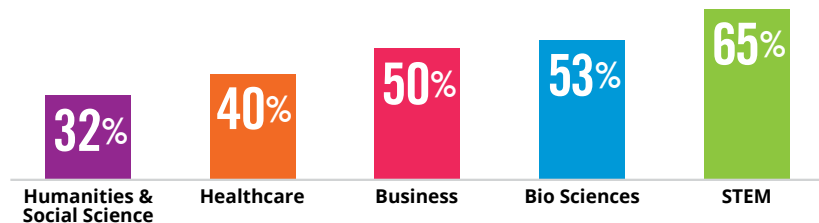
Test your students' career-readiness with this [interactive quiz](#) using data from the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE).

#### U.S. UNEMPLOYMENT RATE PERCENTAGE



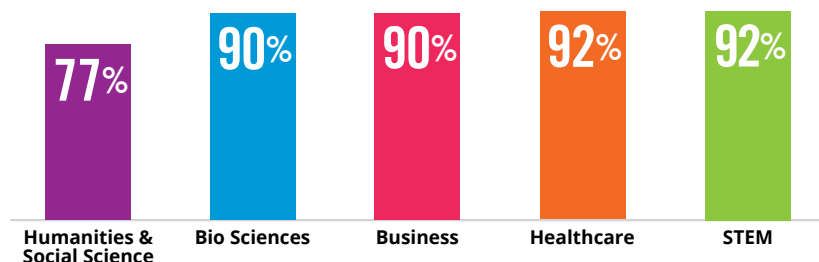
#### PERCENT WHO BELIEVE THE U.S. ECONOMIC OUTLOOK IS BETTER NOW COMPARED TO FIRST YEAR OF COLLEGE

All Recent or Near Graduates, N=2,500



#### PERCENTAGE OF GRADUATES WHO THINK JOBS WILL INCREASE IN THEIR FIELD OF STUDY IN THE NEXT 2 YEARS

All Recent or Near Graduates, N=2,500





# National Results

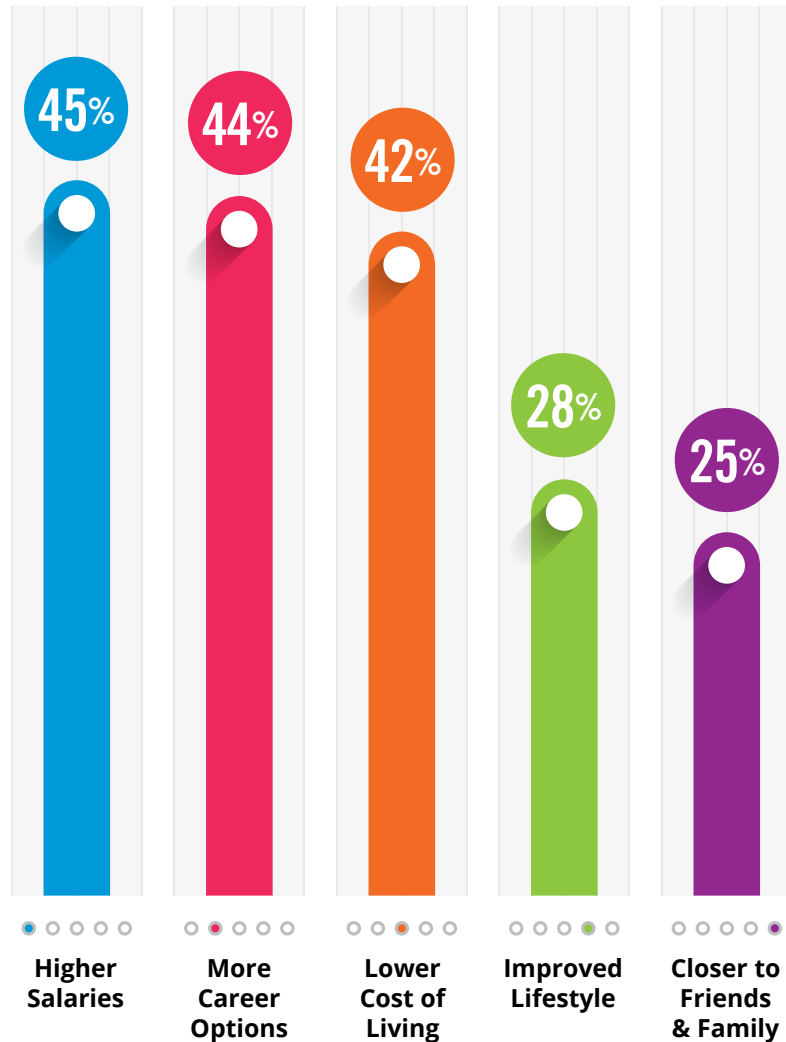
## Employment Indicators



### Graduates On the Move

For near and recent graduates moving locations within the next year, **career advancement is their top reason.**

### RECENT GRADUATE MOTIVATION FOR MOVING



### Employment Indicators at a Glance

When it comes to their job prospects, survey participants embrace optimism— a trend that corresponds with the declining unemployment rates and robust employment index scores.



# National Results

## Social Indicators



**36% OF RESPONDENTS**

believe the country is heading in the right direction.



**29%**

**OF U.S. FEMALES**

view the country's direction in a positive light.



**49%**

**OF U.S. MALES**

view the country's direction in a positive light.



**18%**

**OF DEMOCRATS**

view the country's direction positively.



**68%**

**OF REPUBLICANS**

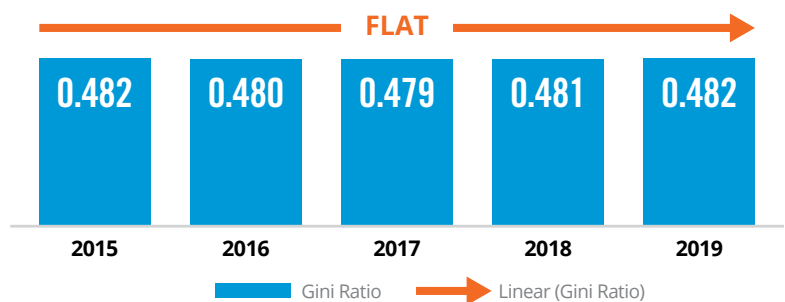
view the country's direction positively.



### Income Inequality

Income inequality—which refers to the extent to which income is distributed in an uneven manner among a population—has remained relatively unchanged over the past four years.

### INCOME INEQUALITY







# National Results

## Social Indicators



### Healthcare Costs

**62%**

of near or recent graduates report difficulty covering their healthcare costs, with

**26%**

reporting difficulty covering routine care.

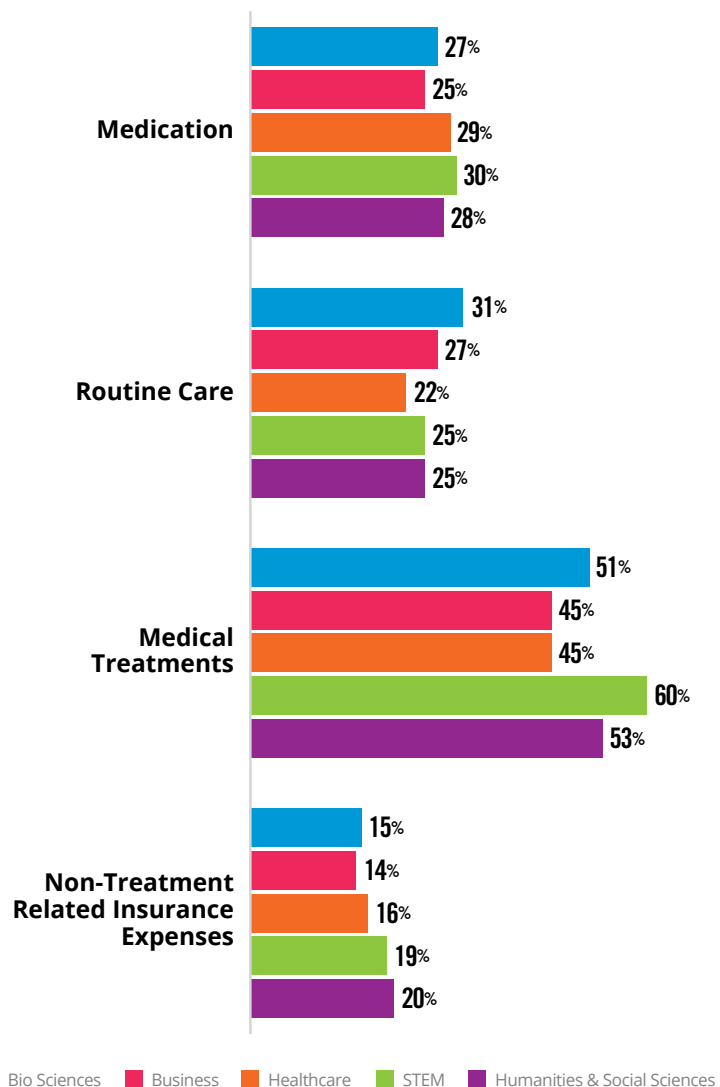


### The Affordability Dilemma

Healthcare costs are just one issue for today's students. Learn more about the impact of costs in education and what instructors and institutions can do about it in our ebook, [Affordability in Higher Education](#).

### TYPES OF HEALTHCARE COSTS THAT HAVE EVER BEEN DIFFICULT TO COVER

Recent or Near College Graduates Who Have Had to Personally Pay for Health Expenses, N=2,129





# National Results

## Social Indicators



### Work-Life Balance

Above all other non-financial factors, near and recent graduates value work-life balance the most. However, only about

**29%**

of employed graduates report having that balance in their current jobs.

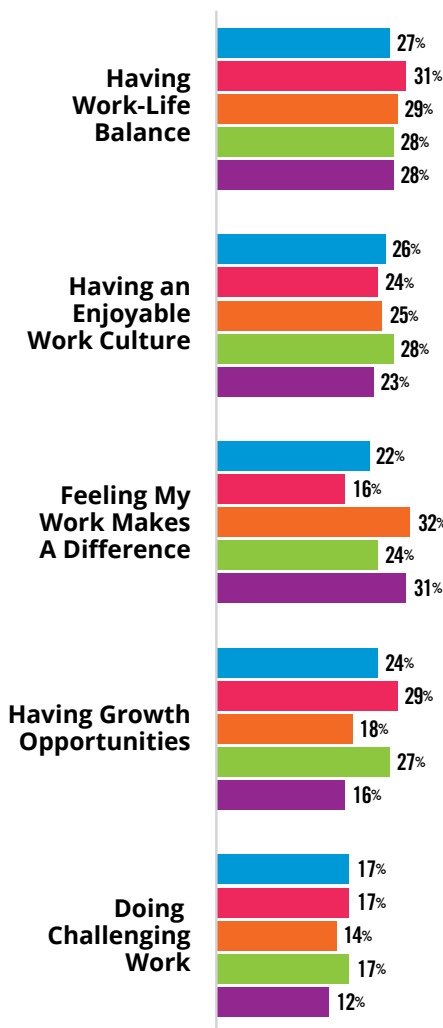


### Healthcare and Social Science majors

are most likely to feel their work makes a difference—the top factor for job satisfaction in both groups.

### NON-FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS OFFERED BY CURRENT JOBS

Factors Important to Employed Near or Recent Graduate  
Job Satisfaction, n=2,102



■ Bio Sciences ■ Business ■ Healthcare ■ STEM ■ Humanities & Social Sciences



### Social Indicators at a Glance

Survey respondents show growing optimism toward the nation's direction—despite political division, work-life balance and healthcare cost difficulties, **82%** of near and recent graduates say they are optimistic about their futures.



# National Results

## Personal Well-Being Indicators

Graduates are highly optimistic, reporting steady improvement in their overall lives.



61%

of students and graduates surveyed feel they will be better off than their parents.



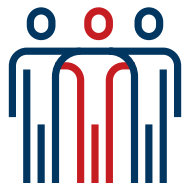
### Physical Health

On average, **83%** of people across the country report **Good** or **Better** health consistently according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.



### Mental Health

Rates of mental illness have **remained constant** in recent years, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.



### Social Relationships

Survey respondents are largely content with their social relationships, listing an average of **five people** who respondents consider close friends.



### Romantic Relationships

When asked to rate the quality of their romantic relationships, **70%** of near and recent grads reported feeling satisfied with their love life.



# National Results

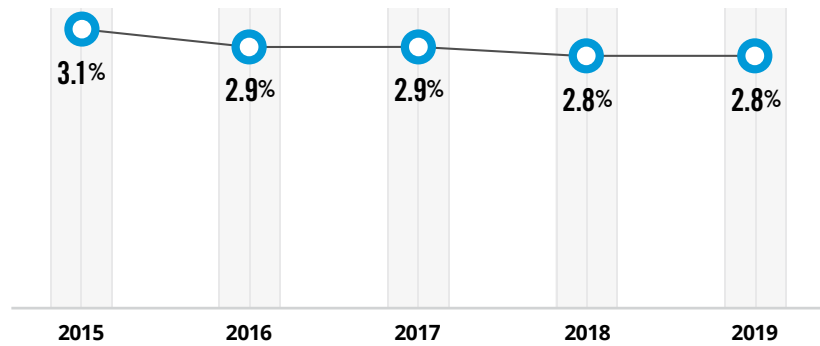
## Personal Well-Being Indicators



### Safety

Safety scores have **steadily increased**, indicating an overall decline of nationwide crime.

#### TOTAL U.S. CRIME RATE PERCENTAGE



### Quality of Life Outlook Compared to Parents

When asked how near and recent grads view their quality of life in comparison with their parents, respondents indicated that:



**61%**

believe their quality of life will be better.



**26%**

believe their quality of life will be about the same.



**14%**

believe it will be worse.



### Personal Well-Being at a Glance

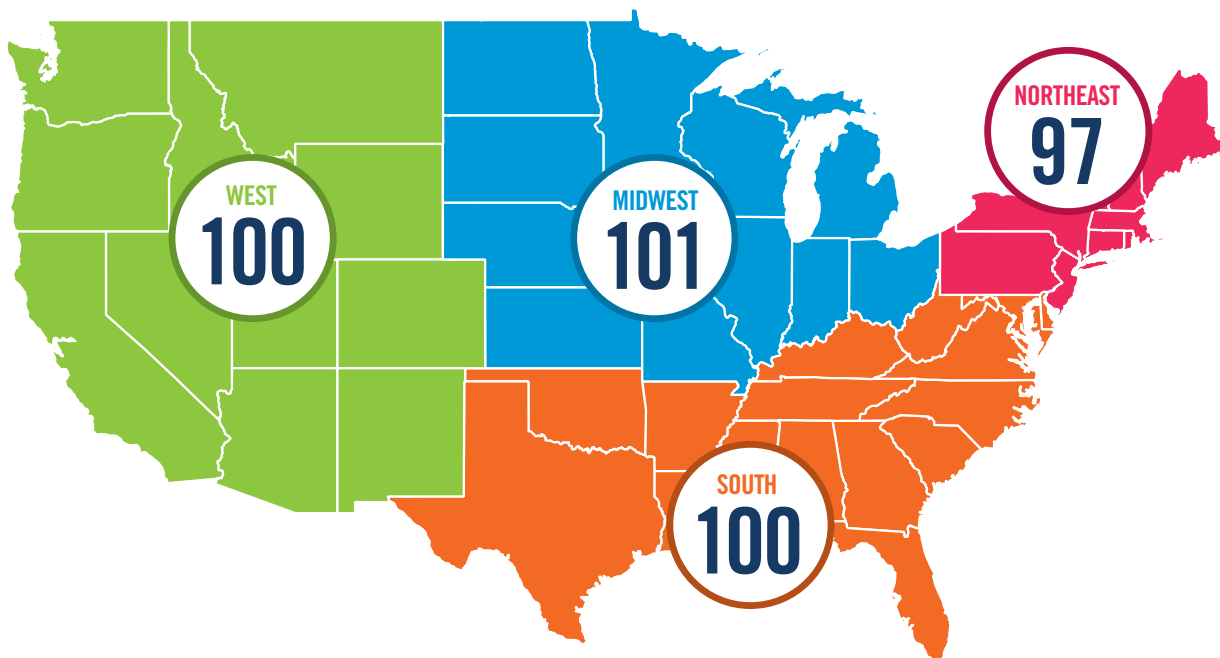
Near and recent graduates are increasingly optimistic about their futures, and generally happy with their quality of life. Compared to previous generations, respondents are confident that their quality of life will continue to improve—surpassing their parents.



# Regional Results

## Regional Opportunity: Index Scores at a Glance

While student opportunity in 2019 is good, the areas and rates of that improvement vary region to region.



### WEST

With an index score of 100, the West **performs better economically** than any other region.

### MIDWEST

With an index score of 101, the Midwest boasts **the highest college graduate employment score** of all regions.

### SOUTH

With an index score of 100, the South has **the second lowest student debt levels** across regions.

### NORTHEAST

With an index score of 97, the Northeast ranks **highest in personal well-being**.





## Regional Results

### NORTHEAST

- Most challenging economic conditions of all regions
- Highest graduate unemployment of all regions
- Highest student debt burden of all regions
- Highest personal well-being scores of all regions



### MIDWEST

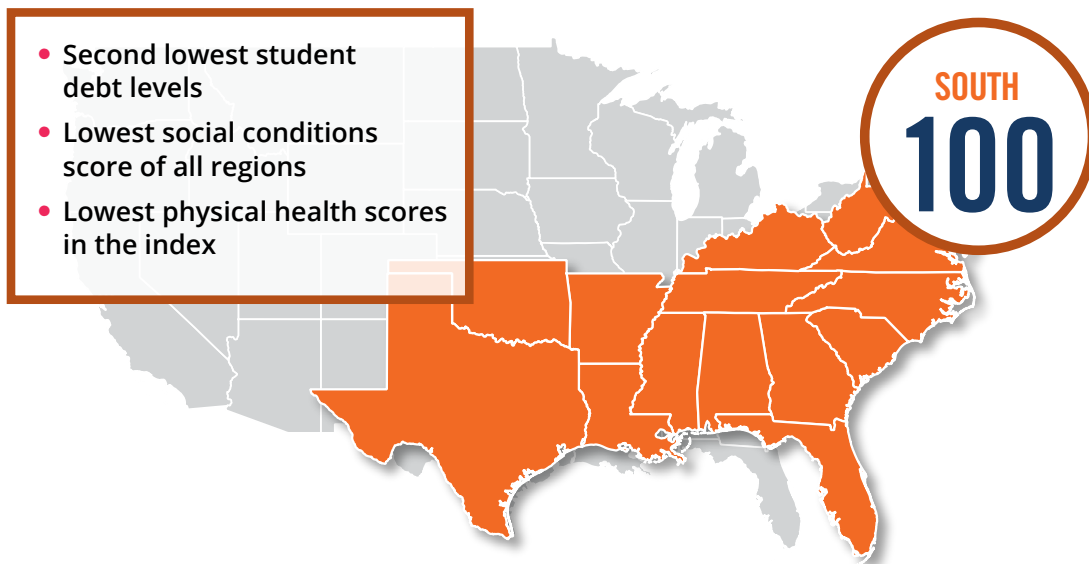
- Highest employment score of all regions
- Highest social score of all regions
- Second highest healthcare coverage score of all regions
- Second highest student debt burden
- Lowest quality of social relationships among regions



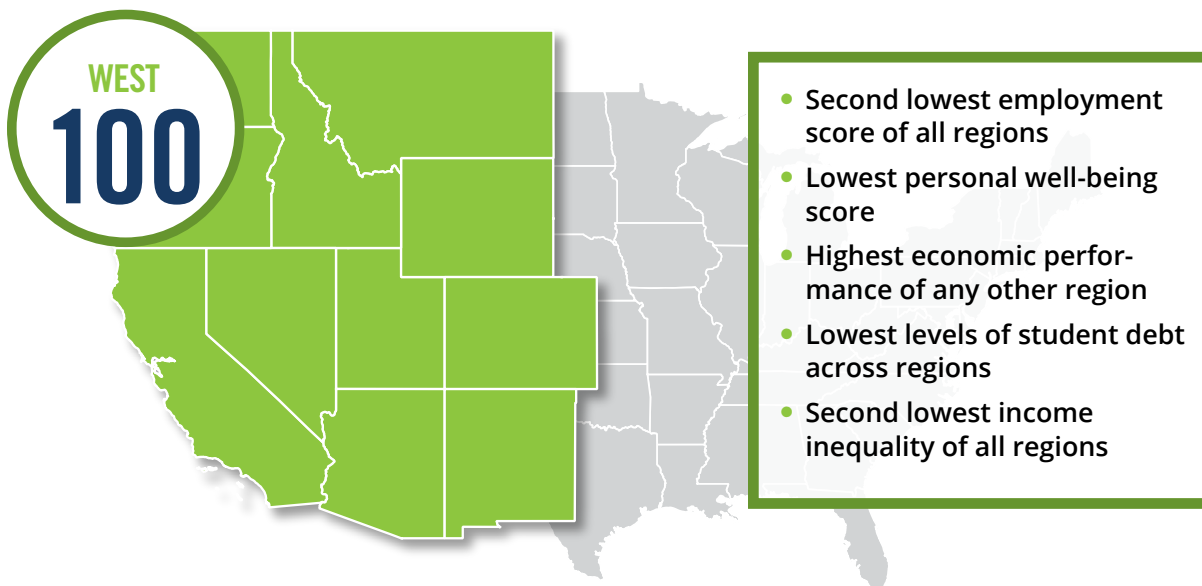


# Regional Results

## SOUTH



## WEST



# What Now?

The overall opportunity environment is improving for near and recent graduates. Employment and personal well-being indicators show strength—resulting in high student confidence. However, the social and economic landscapes provide unique challenges that near and recent graduates may not be expecting.

## 4 Things You Can Do to Help Your Students

- 1 Build Soft Skills:** Student success extends far beyond course mastery. Soft skills, like leadership and communication, are increasingly important to employers (learn more in our [recent study](#) with Morning Consult)—helping students develop these skills will prepare them to for life after graduation. For useful strategies to incorporate soft skills into your courses, check out [our recent blog series](#).
- 2 Discuss the Impact of Lifestyle Choices:** Regional opportunity varies widely—some areas typically mean higher salaries; others support better work-life balance. Get your students thinking about what's important to them now. According to [one study](#), good lifestyle choices in college translate to success in post-grad life. By instilling these good habits early, students will be better able to accurately assess the opportunities available to them. For example, if a student wants to move to the Midwest based on high employment scores, they'll be more likely to consider additional factors like the region's low ranking on social relationship quality.
- 3 Build Student Confidence:** Confident learners thrive in academia as well as life—do your students recognize their own potential? [Research indicates](#) that confidence directly improves one's ability to respond to setbacks, and perform under pressure. Take a look at [our checklist](#) for 10 tips on how to boost student confidence in your classes.
- 4 Keep Affordability in Mind:** Near and recent graduates are entering the workforce with a number of unique economic and career hurdles. As an instructor, finding ways to keep learning affordable for students can go a long way to set them up for future success. Check out our related resources [dedicated to affordability](#) in education to learn more.



For more research and insights into the landscape students are entering today, as well as useful information and resources you can use to equip them for success, visit [Today's Learner](#).

