

Class

of 2021

Report



An annual survey report to help HR professionals navigate Gen Z hiring and thrive in the new talent economy



Introduction

Talent is more important than ever in today's evolving business environment. Attracting, engaging, hiring, and advancing a winning workforce could be the difference between a business that thrives and fails.

iCIMS' sixth annual "Class of" report is designed to help employers chart a successful future in this new world of work. It provides a global perspective from HR professionals and this year's college graduates from the United States, United Kingdom, and France alongside the realities of a business environment forever changed as the result of the pandemic.



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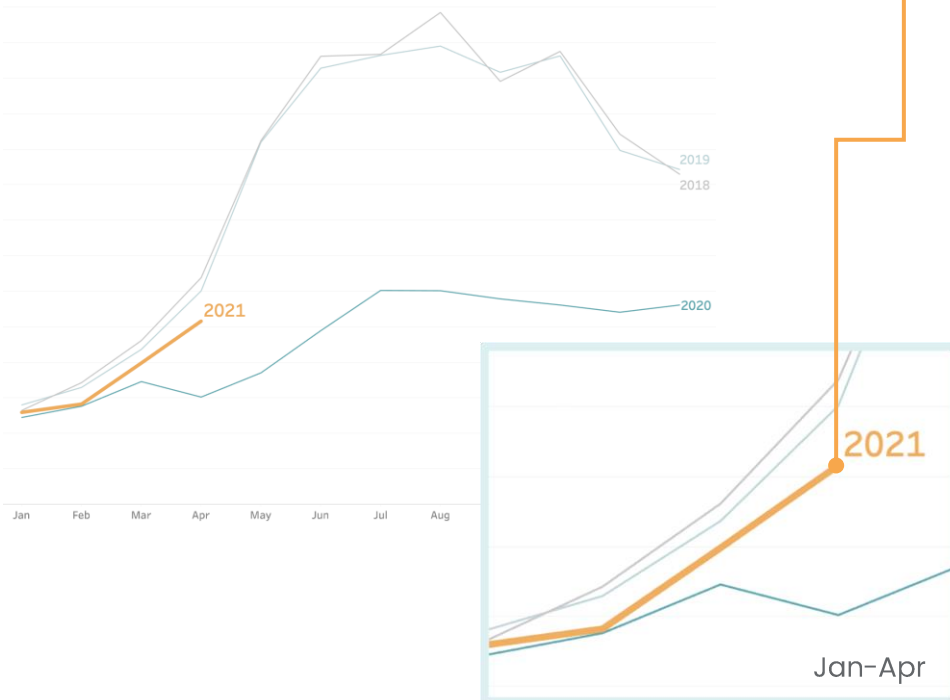
State of hiring

Jobs are available. Job seekers are not. As the economy continues to shift and the world starts to see the light at the end of the pandemic tunnel, employers are looking for, and need, talent to move forward and be successful – but available talent has been hard to find of late.

Will this prove to be good news for the class of 2021?

Although this year’s college graduates are entering a volatile job market, nearly 60% of HR professionals say they are opening new positions to entry-level hires. **iCIMS data shows entry-level hiring patterns are beginning to follow pre-pandemic patterns** meaning there is a potential spike in hiring on the precipice over the next several months.

New graduate hiring activity, 2018 – 2021



This job market is likely not the one recent graduates thought they would enter into, but it is better than the one that welcomed their peers last year. It is also better than what college seniors faced during the 2009 recession. [The National Association of Colleges and Employers](#) (NACE) reports that seniors face a "more positive than expected" outlook compared to that of the last major recession, nearly 10% more employers plan to maintain or increase the number of college hires in 2021 than in 2009.

Time is of the essence

Hiring timeline expectations and realities



Nearly half (46%) of college seniors expect the job application process to take

no more than 3 weeks

In reality, entry level roles are taking

more than 6 weeks

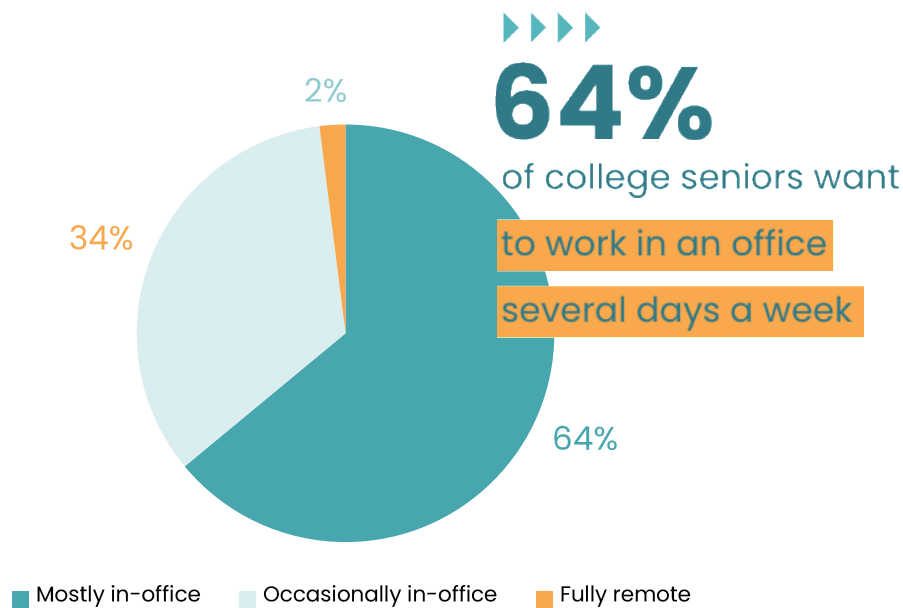
(45 days) and that timeframe increases another week (to 52 days) for tech jobs with specific skill sets



Reverse course: Digital natives, but not at work

Although jobs await, they may not be exactly what the class of 2021 has in mind for their first career. Gen Z is by far the most digital generation. They grew up with technology at their fingertips, but their digital inclinations don't fully extend to their professional lives.

Many businesses are working overtime to best transition to hybrid, or in some cases permanent, remote work in the post-pandemic world, yet the latest crop of potential hires is moving in the opposite direction. **In fact, nearly two-thirds of college seniors want to work in an office several days a week or full time. Just 2% want to work remotely full time.**



"The human element of working together is important for all employees but so critical for those just starting their careers.

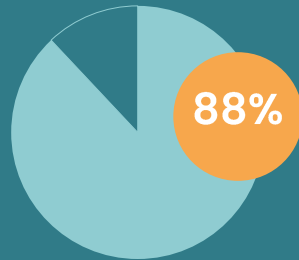
As HR leaders, we are responsible for helping facilitate that **fundamental need for connection, networking and professional development**"

– Jewell Parkinson,
chief people officer, iCIMS

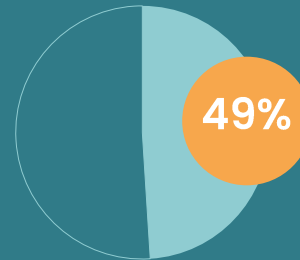
Their employment requirements run counter to widely accepted trends, exposing a fundamental disconnect with HR professionals. [The Conference Board](#) found that one in three HR leaders expect nearly half of their workforce to be primarily remote post-pandemic. Yet only 26% of college seniors say remote work is a selling point; instead, nearly half report that location is an important aspect when considering an employer.



In-office connections: The class of 2021 wants to be on location



The majority want to frequently meet in person with coworkers to build relationships and network



Nearly half consider the physical location of the job when considering whether to apply

College seniors' reluctance to work remotely may be due to a lack of work-from-home readiness. A third (33%) of college seniors say they lack a dedicated workspace, and the majority (58%) say they don't have all the equipment they need. It may also be a general desire to have a "normal" employment experience.

It's not only about their physical workplace. Surprisingly, the digital transformation of the recruiting process may still need to retain a touch of the "old school." The majority of 18- to 24-year-olds are very likely to report using popular video-based social sites in their personal lives, including Instagram (76%), Snapchat (75%), or TikTok (55%), but are still getting comfortable with video in their professional lives. The vast majority of college seniors (80%) believe in-person interviews are how they best present themselves to a potential employer. This is an opportunity for HR professionals to share why video tools are critical to the hiring process and how applicants can best leverage them.

How else does this incoming class of job seekers think about the world of work?



Class of 2021 hiring perspectives **at-a-glance**

Salary

In the U.S., **college seniors anticipate earning an average salary of \$51,931** for their first job out of school. **HR professionals expect to pay 22% more for an entry-level salary than in March 2020, with figures coming in at \$66,620 on average.** Meaning this year's graduates are **leaving nearly \$15,000 on the table.**

In the U.K., college seniors expect to earn an average salary of £26,932 (\$37,852*). In France, the average expectation is €31,551 (\$38,101*).

Hiring timelines

More than two in five college seniors expect the hiring process to take only three weeks, from applying to receiving an offer. The majority (76%) believe they should hear from a recruiter within seven days of applying.

Entry-level positions are being filled more quickly than in years past. **Currently, the average time to fill entry-level positions is six and a half weeks.**

Communication and video

The majority (97%) of HR professionals plan to continue using video as part of the hiring process over the next 12 months. The top three use cases: video chat (live), interviews (55%), training/onboarding videos (46%), and on career sites (44%).

HR professionals have an opportunity to educate Gen Z on leveraging video in the application, interview, and hiring process. Currently, **80% of college seniors believe in-person interviews are how they best present themselves to a potential employer.** Students in France feel this most strongly, with 90% believing in-person interviews show their best side.

Hiring criteria

Resumes are still important, but not everywhere. **Almost half (46%) of HR pros don't rank resumes as a top-three item when considering entry-level talent,** and 38% of college seniors agree it's not top three in importance for landing a job.

Half (50%) of HR pros rank skills (hard and soft) as a top priority.



Class of 2021 hiring perspectives **at-a-glance**

Hiring process

Only 28% of HR professionals say their company proactively creates a pipeline of talent; a plurality (44%) only recruit new hires on demand when openings arise.

Remote work

College seniors are looking forward to a "return to normal": **64% of college seniors want to be in the office at least several times a week with their coworkers.**

Remote work options are not high on the list of priorities that students look for in an employer, with it being a consideration for 29% of those in the U.S., 28% of those in the U.K., and only 17% of students in France.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion

Around two-thirds of HR professionals (65%) are concerned their company doesn't promote its diversity and inclusion enough. The good news is that HR professionals and college seniors agree that the job interview process is the most important way to showcase diversity.

Internal mobility

One in five organizations (21%) do not have internal mobility programs for entry-level employees, and nearly 10% say they don't have internal mobility programs for employees at any level.



Attract



the Gen Z talent your organization
needs to be successful now





Attract

Employers are ready to get back to business as usual. Will the class of 2021 be the job seekers who help make it happen?

Labor shortage or surplus?

The workforce at large is facing labor shortages, but applications from 18- to 24-year-olds are up 15% compared to Q1 of 2020. This is occurring in nearly all industries. Applications from candidates aged 25+ have seen declines across service (-10%), financial, insurance, real estate (-13%), and manufacturing (-28%) while Gen Z continues to apply.

Women in this cohort of candidates are exhibiting similar behavior changes as the overall workforce. Women ages 18 to 24 are applying to jobs at a lesser rate, despite being less likely to be affected by external factors of the pandemic (e.g., childcare) that forced women of older generations to stop working and looking for jobs.

The Gender Gap: Fewer 18- to 24-year-old women applying to jobs



Applications from Gen Z men grew **5x** more than Gen Z women

The **majority** of Gen Z job applicants has shifted from women to men



Stay ahead of the competition

The vast majority of companies haven't taken action to get through anticipated labor challenges. Only around a quarter (28%) of HR professionals say they are proactively hiring, curating, and nurturing a talent pipeline. In contrast, a plurality (44%) recruit on demand, only as positions arise.

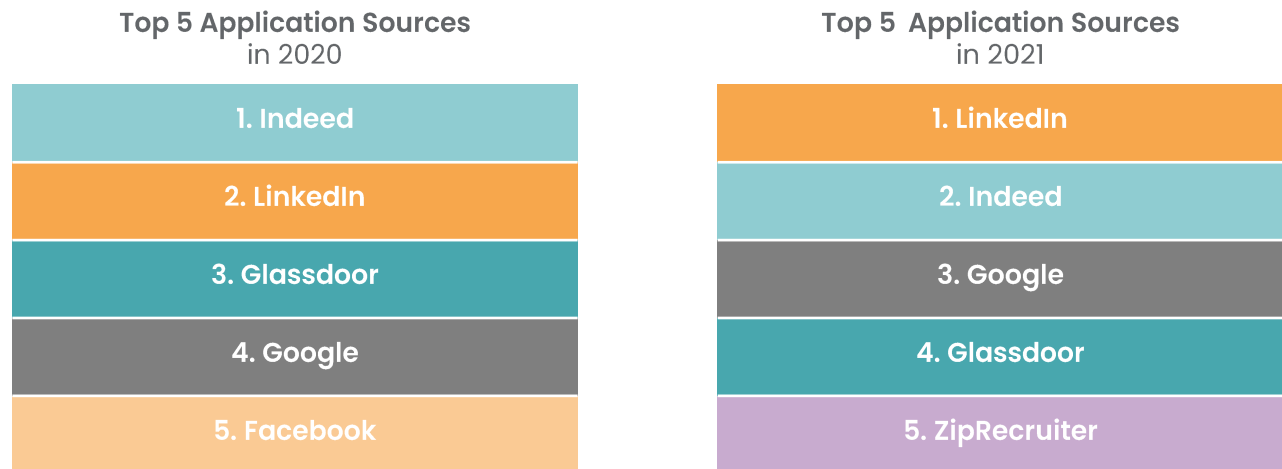
Maintaining momentum throughout the hiring process is critical. Employers that take a more proactive approach to sourcing and engaging talent will be the most successful in securing a winning workforce.



Meet them where they are

In the last year, there has been a shift in where 18- to 24-year olds are job hunting online. Unfortunately, there is a slight disconnect in terms of the places where recruiters are sourcing candidates. The majority of recruiters use online job boards like Indeed but leverage social media and employee referrals ahead of LinkedIn.

On the hunt: Top entry-level application sources



For employers, this presents an opportunity to increase employer brand efforts and online presence across social media and on career sites:

- **Leverage "day-in-the-life" testimonials** to help candidates get a feel for your culture and what it is like to work for your organization.
- **Highlight tangible benefits and opportunities** for career growth.
- **Illustrate a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion** by sharing details about organizational clubs and employee resource groups (ERGs).

Job seekers age **18-24** are more engaged with employers' career sites spending nearly 40% longer researching and reviewing a potential employer online than applicants older than 25



Engage



with early-career candidates the way they prefer to connect



Engage

Engaging the class of 2021 revolves around creating authentic, dynamic experiences. With college seniors reporting they prefer to work in-person, how can employers bridge the gap between the way companies are operating and new hire expectations?

Digital life

Although the majority of college seniors believe an in-person hiring experience is the best way to represent themselves, HR professionals have become accustomed to the efficiency of using digital tools and will continue to rely on them.

The circumstances of the pandemic made video interviews indispensable for HR professionals, and there's no going back.

Nearly all (97%) will use video to hire in the next 12 months, leveraging the tool throughout the entire candidate journey.



44%

on career sites



55%

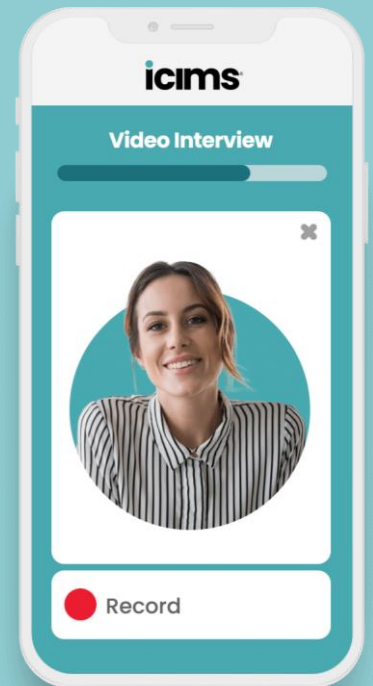
for live video interviews



46%

for onboarding

Other commonly used digital tools include scheduling (58%), sending automated emails (41%), and virtual career fairs (39%).



Recruiters reported an **80% decrease** in the time required for effective screening and a **57% decrease** in time to fill open positions when using video technology





<p>Why is diversity at iCIMS important?</p>  <p>Nishat Gupta Service representative</p>	<p>What is the culture at iCIMS like?</p>  <p>Samantha Klien Director of engineering</p>	<p>What is a core value at iCIMS?</p>  <p>Paul Sharpe Sales representative</p>	<p>How does iCIMS support women in tech?</p>  <p>Sara Linden Project manager</p>	<p>What types of training does iCIMS offer?</p>  <p>Elaine Burns Marketing manager</p>
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Benefits of Video and Virtual Hiring: **Simplicity, Scale, Speed**

Educate recent college graduates on how to present themselves best in a virtual setting and get more comfortable with video tools in the hiring process. Pull out and share!

- **Be yourself.** Allow for your personality to shine. For instance, if you speak with your hands in person, don't feel like you have to hold back on video
- **Check your connection.** Make sure you have the required technology and a strong Wi-Fi connection ahead of getting on a live chat or video interview. Doing a test run can help ease last-minute tech issues
- **Tidy up.** Ensure you have a well-lit and clean background. This not only helps keep the interviewers focus on you, but it also helps lessen distractions for yourself

Texting is also still a top tool in helping employers actively recruit candidates anywhere, anytime. Texts sent from employers to candidates increased by 34% from Q1 2020 to Q1 2021.

Like job seekers in general, most college seniors (89%) are comfortable texting with potential employers as part of the job interview process, but they are more comfortable with certain aspects than others.

"Text messaging was a key component to building our talent pipeline. [With iCIMS], we've increased our candidate pool **tenfold**." – HR operations supervisor



Hit me up: Top texting preferences of the class of 2021



60%

of college seniors are comfortable scheduling an interview via text



58%

of college seniors are comfortable receiving text messages for application status updates



43%

of college seniors are comfortable accepting a job offer via text

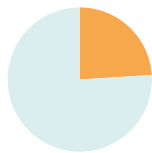


Dealing in diversity

Diversity, equity, and inclusion are core tenets of the talent experience. HR professionals and college seniors agree on the need for companies' increased diversity and inclusion. Around two-thirds of HR professionals (65%) are at least somewhat concerned that their company isn't doing enough to promote its diversity and inclusion, including 46% who are very to extremely concerned.

Organizations less than 10 years old are significantly more concerned than others about [not reaching diverse talent pools](#), 74% compared to just 43% at companies that have been in business more than 20 years. Despite start-up organizations' concerns, less than a third (31%) have made technological investments to address this.

Keep it real: Class of 2021 expects authenticity in diversity efforts



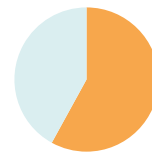
24%

of college seniors consider whether the company includes a mention of diversity on its website



25%

evaluate diversity based on photos of diverse coworkers on the career page



58%

look for diversity to be showcased during the hiring or interview process

Fortunately, the most common way HR professionals are promoting diversity is where college seniors are most likely evaluating it: **during the job interview process**. Around three in five HR professionals (59%) say they use the interview to promote diversity, and a similar 58% of college seniors say that is where they look for it. This most prominently includes having a diverse hiring team.

Foundational steps to reassess and redefine diversity efforts



Identify

what diversity means for your organization now



Analyze

how your people, processes, and technology can better align with that



Commit

to an actionable time-bound plan for lasting diversity

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▶▶▶▶

Hire

▶▶▶▶

the right entry-level talent to build
the future of your workforce



Hire

According to IDC, the age of strategic talent acquisition has arrived. With it, "skills compatibility, translation, and capability will be a more effective way of hiring than traditional resumes and applications."

Is the resume dead?

This year's graduates and HR professionals agree that interview staples such as resumes are falling out of favor. Nearly two in five (38%) college seniors don't consider the resume a top-three tool in finding a job, and the majority (87%) are not willing to invest in professional services to improve its presentation. That said, they are keen to gain the skills necessary to land them the job, with 40% willing to build expertise with certifications, extra coursework, or other paid programs.



Similarly, roughly half of HR professionals (46%) don't consider resumes a top three in importance when evaluating entry-level talent. Instead, they rate experience (54%) and hard and soft skills (50%) as more valuable.

What does a post-resume world look like?

Today, most HR professionals do not rely on other digital-first alternatives, like an online portfolio (19%) or a video application (19%).

Dynamic profiles can help employers capture an individual's experience and skills as they happen. They are a critical differentiator in revealing potential and opening the door to new opportunities with less friction.

With the ability to more efficiently view and evaluate candidates' expertise in one place, employers can make better-informed decisions, and higher quality hires without relying on resumes.



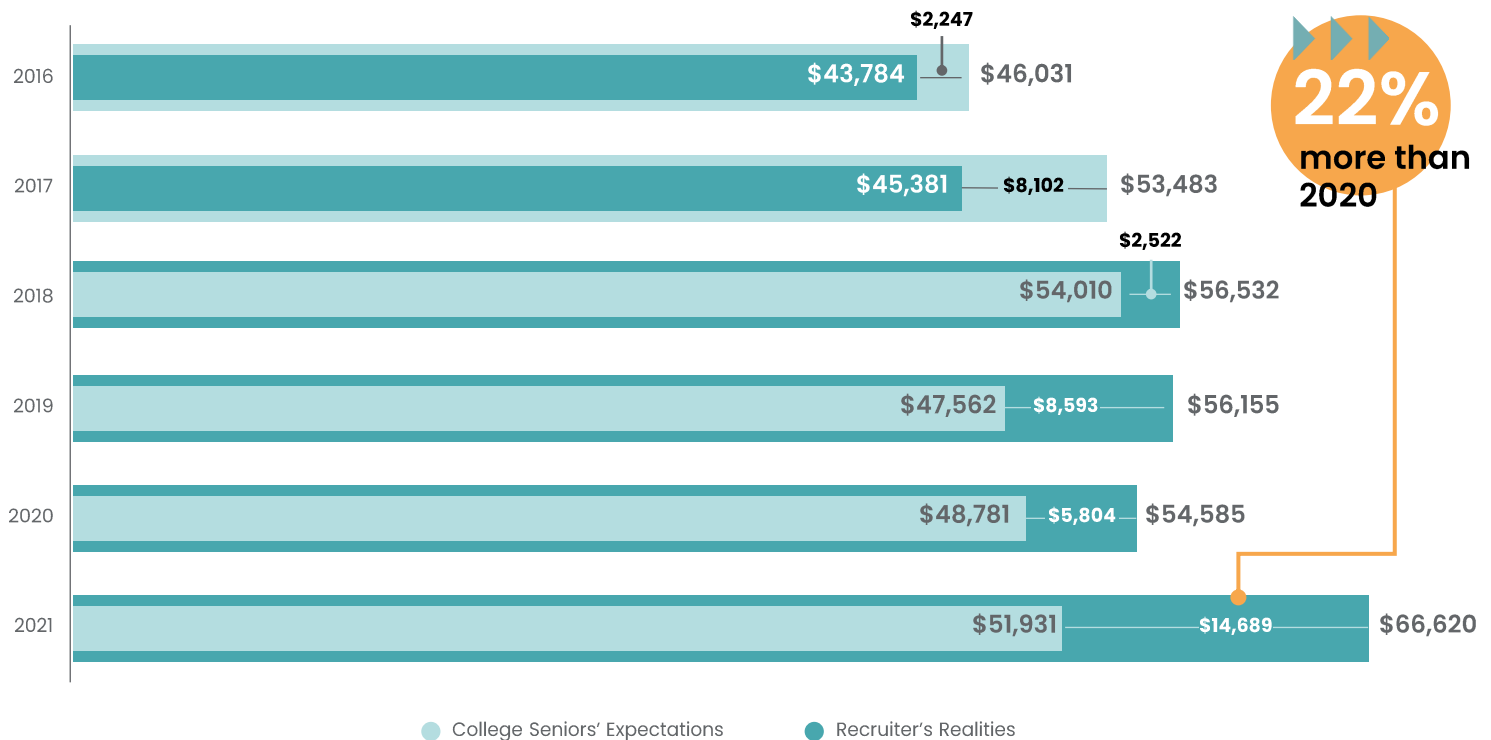
Leaving money on the table

For the last several years, college seniors have undervalued their worth to employers. The class of 2021 is following suit.

This year, U.S. HR professionals expect to pay 22% more for an entry-level salary than March 2020; but college seniors are only expecting 6% more. This means students are leaving nearly \$15,000 on the table.

In the U.K., college seniors expect to earn an average salary of £26,932 (\$37,852*). In France, the average entry-level salary expectation is €31,551 (\$38,101*).

Trend Watch: U.S. entry-level salaries 2016–2021



Backup plans – Job search in a time of economic uncertainty

Students in all markets are increasing the number and type of jobs they apply for in response to the pandemic and economic uncertainty. However, students from France are nearly as likely to consider putting off their job search and going to graduate school (44%) compared to just 26% of U.S. students and 22% of U.K. students.



College seniors are also **considering taking a year off**

before applying (26%), moving back in with their parents (25%), or trying their luck in the gig economy instead of looking for a full-time job (22%)

*as of May 12, 2021

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Advance

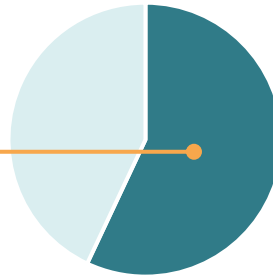


the class of 2021 with strong internal training and mobility programs to improve retention, culture, and reskill for hard-to-fill roles



Advance

HR professionals estimate, on average, **only 57%** of entry-level talent they hire will stay a full year at their company.



Turnover is expensive. [Gallup](#) estimates that it costs U.S. businesses \$1 trillion annually and it's been reported that replacement costs can be up to two times an individual employee's annual salary. Employers are losing a lot of money by not retaining their newest employees. How can employers better retain top talent?

Invest in the future

One in five organizations do not have internal mobility programs for entry-level employees. This is a miss for these organizations. Fostering employee growth and providing professional development opportunities empowers employees and strengthens business, helping employers solve for skills gaps and build high-performing teams.

Advancing talent begins with providing a clear path to growth. Create a culture that encourages internal mobility, making it easy for candidates to engage with recruiters to share their interests and other areas of expertise. This helps ensure hiring teams are aware of the skills within the organization. Leverage internal career sites to feature open positions, projects, and upskilling opportunities, enabling hiring teams to tap into internal candidates who may have been overlooked otherwise.



American
Heart
Association.

American Heart Association fosters career growth with a talent exchange

American Heart Association promotes professional development by bringing diverse skillsets together from across the organization to tackle unique projects. Employees contribute to different areas of the organization, build relationships, hone skills, and flex new muscles they might not use in their typical day-to-day.

The Impact

1,000+

hours of productivity saved per year

200%

saved annually with less new hire onboarding



Lessons

learned

From our future
workforce,
the class of 2021

As this year's class of graduating college seniors closes their textbooks, turns their tassel (albeit potentially virtually), and sets out on their journey to land a job, there are many lessons that recruiters and HR leaders can learn from their preferred communication styles, workplace culture, and professional expectations.

Here are the top tips for employers to keep in mind to win over the newest wave of talent while navigating the complexities of the labor market:

1. **Be inclusive in your interviewing process** and authentically showcase your diverse talent
2. **Give your talent options on workplace preferences** (if possible) – remote, virtual, hybrid
3. **Use video** to offer a differentiated experience
4. **Leverage texting** to engage during key hiring milestones

Ahead of the curve

Stay ahead of today's hiring challenges with data and insights to prepare you for what's next. Visit iCIMS [Insights](#) for monthly hiring activity and actionable insights to attract, engage, hire, and advance a winning workforce.



Methodology

This survey was conducted among 500 U.S. human resource or recruiting professionals, 500 U.S. college seniors, 250 U.K. college seniors, and 250 France college seniors between April 9 and April 23, 2021, using an email invitation and an online survey. When reporting tracking data, the U.S. data was weighted to ensure samples could be compared to data collected in 2020.



About iCIMS' proprietary platform data

iCIMS' platform data is drawn from our proprietary database of 120 million applications, 64 million applicants, and 3.8 million hires by more than 4,000 customers. iCIMS customers represent a broad swath of the U.S. economy, with expansive geographic, industry, and occupational representation.



About iCIMS

iCIMS is the talent cloud company that empowers organizations to attract, engage, hire, and advance the right talent that builds a diverse, winning workforce. iCIMS accelerates transformation for a community of more than 4,000 customers, including 40% of the Fortune 100.

For more insights and perspectives, visit www.icims.com/insights.