



STUDENT BENCHMARK SURVEY: PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Overview and Implications for Spring Activities

The student benchmark survey results and chat sessions tell a rich story and provide useful insights that inform the activities being planned on the six pilot campuses in the spring. The good news is that the interest is there – but we need to get information and tools to students about how they can convert that interest into an actual internship or job with the federal government. Key things to keep in mind as you are designing your activities and materials for the spring include:

- Do not spend time trying to combat negative stereotypes, because these are not significant barriers. Students seem quite open to the fact that there are good federal jobs for people like them, but they know very little about how to get these jobs. It is much more productive to have a strategy of positive statements that contain as much concrete and detailed information as possible.
- Personalize outreach to students as much as possible. Broad messages about “the government” or generic opportunities will not resonate the same way as targeted messages about specific occupational areas, examples of opportunities for different academic disciplines and examples of recent alums who are working in government. Engineering departments should have a different tailored message and materials than the political science department, for instance.
- Similarly, it is important to go to the student instead of waiting for the student to seek out the information. Career services is a critical cornerstone for disseminating information about federal opportunities, but having federal recruiters visit classrooms, having faculty members or alums talk about their research or experiences with federal agencies as part of a course curriculum, equipping advisors with the appropriate information and even sharing information with RAs to distribute in residence halls will greatly enhance reach and impact. This is particularly important since students report that advisors and faculty are key influencers when it comes to internships and jobs.

The remainder of this memo provides a summary of the methodology of the survey and highlights key findings of the benchmark results.

Methodology for the Student Baseline Survey

Over 3200 juniors, seniors and graduate students were surveyed across the six pilot schools: Clark Atlanta University, George Washington University, Louisiana State University, Ohio State University, Stanford University and the University of New Mexico. The control group was composed of 400 college juniors and seniors from across the country. Because of our focus on engineers, graduate-level engineers from each university except Clark Atlanta were included in

the student population. In addition, at Clark Atlanta and the University of New Mexico, graduate students in public administration were included in the student sample.

The survey was web-based, with mostly closed-ended questions. In addition, approximately 40 students at each university (except Stanford) and 40 students from the control group were invited to participate in an online “chat” with a trained interviewer; these qualitative results inform and “flesh out” the reasons behind the quantitative results.

The analysis below presents results for undergraduates only (excluding the graduate level engineers and the graduate level public policy students). Results presented for engineers include undergraduate AND graduate engineers combined. No results are presented for grad students of public administration at this time.

To account for differences in school size and response rates, results from each school were weighted as 1/6 of the total combined school sample. Unless otherwise noted, survey results exclude non-U.S. citizens.

Preliminary Findings

Are students interested in working for the federal government?

Interest among undergraduate college students in employment in the federal government is high: Overall, 42% of respondents are extremely or very interested in working for the federal government, compared to only 31% of the control group. The federal government lags behind the private sector in this category, but beats the nonprofit sector.

Interest is particularly high among Hispanic students, who show more interest in federal government jobs than any other ethnic group. However, only 12% of Hispanics actually plan on going into careers in the federal government after graduation—a lower percentage than any other ethnic group.

Why are students interested in working for the federal government?

Individual contact is important in increasing the likelihood of interest in federal jobs. The activities that were most influential in making respondents “much more likely” to be interested were: speaking to a recruiter from a federal agency, discussing with a professor and meeting with an advisor. Data sources (such as brochures and web information) are also useful, but contact with individuals is more influential.

When looking at compelling reasons students want to work for the federal government, there are varying factors that appeal to different people. Looking across demographics, top factors and messages include: “working on issues that interest me” and job characteristics related to “good benefits”. These job characteristics are less important at Stanford and GW than at the other universities. Overall, some of the most compelling factors for undergraduates are: interesting work, making a difference and helping people. Interestingly, “serving your country and community” does not resonate among any groups.

Students also seem to have positive views about working for the federal government. When looking at factors that influence students to work in the federal government, fewer respondents consider traditional barriers (such as “too much bureaucracy” or “pace of advancement too

slow”) as major reasons *against* federal employment. Instead, positive factors (such as “working on issues that interest me” or “ability to help people”) are considered by many more students as major reasons *for wanting* to pursue federal jobs. Therefore, the barrier to federal employment does not appear to be negative attitudes; students seem open to job opportunities within the federal government. In fact, 65% of survey respondents indicated that they agreed with the statement “there are good jobs for people like me in the federal government.”

What do students know about job opportunities in the federal government?

With interest in federal opportunities high, access to *information* appears to be the great challenge. Very few students say they are extremely or very knowledgeable about career or internship opportunities in the federal government. In fact, only 13% of students across schools consider themselves either extremely or very knowledgeable.

It also appears that there is a correlation between *knowledge and interest*. 81% of students who believe “there are good jobs for people like me in the federal government” are extremely or very interested in federal jobs. Additionally, 82% of students who plan on working in the federal government agree that there are good jobs for people like them.

To help those lacking knowledge about jobs for people like them in the federal government, specific information about the necessary kinds of skills and educational backgrounds is important (we heard this repeatedly in focus groups and chat sessions). Salary and benefits information is also useful, especially for African American students. African Americans also consider information about training and personal development opportunities important, as well as about diversity. Training and personal development opportunities are also of particular interest to Hispanics.

What do students plan to do after they graduate?

We found an important difference between interest in working for the federal government and plans for employment. Despite the high level of interest in working for the federal government (42% of undergraduates are extremely or very interested), 17% of students actually plan on going into the federal government immediately after graduation, compared to 25% who plan on working in the private sector. The largest number of students (38%) plan on furthering their education immediately after completing their undergraduate degree.

When interest and plans are examined together, it appears that there is a barrier for those with interest actualizing their goals: less than one third of those who were extremely or very interested in working for the federal government actually plan on getting government jobs after graduation.

What types of information do students want?

Of those who believed there were “good jobs for people like me in the federal government,” personal contact was important. The reasons cited most frequently were: hearing about opportunities in the news, professors and advisors, knowing someone who worked in the federal government, and hearing from friends.

Students need direct and targeted guidance. When asked what kind of information they would seek from sources they were likely to use, 80% of students indicated information about specific job opportunities. 78% indicated that they would seek actual jobs or internships to apply for.

59% of respondents indicated that the format most helpful when seeking information about federal careers was referral to web links. 56% found verbal advice helpful, and 51% found printed handouts or pamphlets helpful. CDs, DVDs and books were less helpful.

What about engineers?

Engineers* are interested in working for the federal government, and believe that “there are good jobs for people like me in the federal government” as much as the combined school (undergraduate) population, but they still plan on working in the private sector. Engineers are the group with the largest percentage of students who plan to work in the private sector (53%) and the smallest percentage of students who plan to work in the federal government (7%).

Engineers are less likely to seek out information on federal jobs than other groups. 27% of engineers have “personally sought information concerning internship or job opportunities in the federal government over the past year,” compared to 36% of undergraduate students from all the schools. Moreover, 41% of engineers that are extremely or very interested in federal jobs sought out information, compared to 57% of all undergraduate students. Engineers can be motivated, however; when looking at factors in considering jobs or internships in the federal government, more than half of engineers indicated that a good work/life balance, consisting of flexible work schedules and good benefits, would be very likely to encourage them.

*The engineers group includes both graduate and undergraduate students of engineering, and includes non- U.S. citizens.