

2023 INCPAS College Student Survey Results

INTRODUCTION



Indiana's postsecondary student population — much like the rest of the country — is increasingly diverse, with 30.8 percent of today's undergraduate college population comprised of students of color, compared to 11.8 percent in 2000.¹ Despite the increased diversity of postsecondary student populations, the accounting talent pipeline lacks any *significant* gains in terms of diversity.²

The Indiana CPA Educational Foundation wanted to better understand what could be done to address this incongruity. Conducting a comprehensive survey of college accounting and business majors gives the Foundation and Indiana CPAs deeper insights into their interests, influences, and career aspirations as they progress toward a CPA. Inspired by the Center for Audit Quality's (CAQ) *Increasing Diversity in the Accounting Profession Pipeline* research, the Foundation sought to determine if insights and actions outlined by the CAQ would resonate with Indiana's college students.

The survey explores what postsecondary students envisage for their future workplaces, their ultimate career objectives, and the external factors shaping these decisions. Moreover, we delve into understanding the alignment between students' expectations and what potential employers offer. By uncovering these insights, the Foundation and Indiana employers can refine recruitment tactics and job propositions to resonate more effectively with emerging talent, fostering a more seamless transition between academic endeavors and the professional realm.

In sharing our findings, we aspire to bridge the divide between the anticipations of Indiana's students and the requisites of employers, fostering a more synergistic landscape between job aspirants and providers.

1 U.S. Department of Education, National Postsecondary Student Aid Study

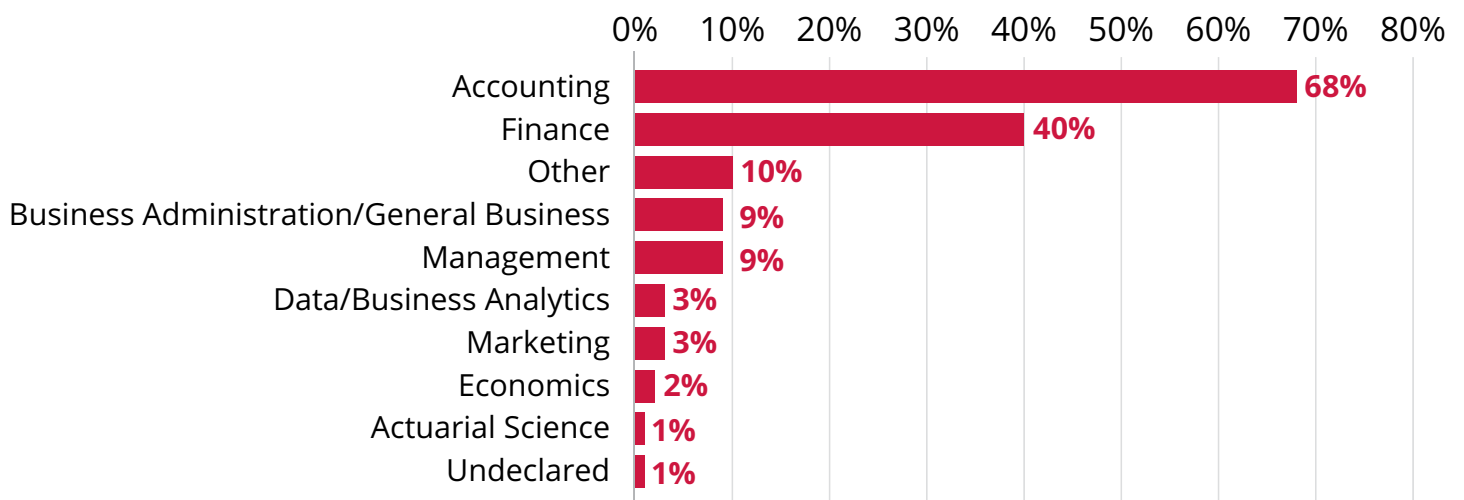
2 AICPA Trends Report, 2023

METHODOLOGY

In spring 2023, the Foundation deployed a quantitative survey to Indiana college and university students. The sample size was 256 students representing 21 different colleges and universities. Survey questions mirrored a survey first deployed by Edge Research in mid-2021 on behalf of the CAQ. It aimed to better understand respondents' motivations, understanding of the CPA profession, and tools of influence. It's important to note, the CAQ's quantitative research sampled 3,837 students, with "an approximate even split amongst high school and college student populations." The Foundation's research focused solely on students already enrolled in postsecondary education.

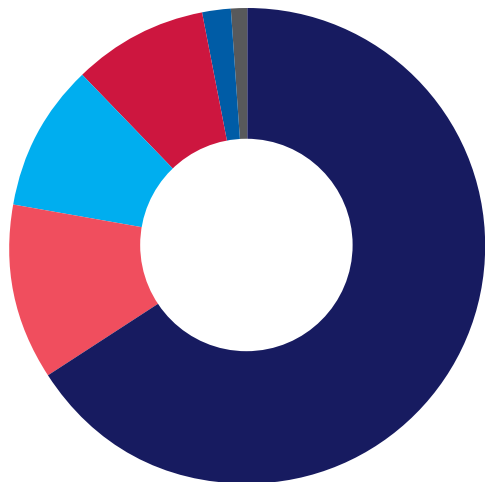
Respondent's College or University	
IUPUI	63
Marian	46
Anderson	31
Grace	21
Ball State	16
University of Indianapolis	16
Purdue	15
Indiana State	7
Indiana Tech	7
Trine	6
Indiana Wesleyan	5
Did Not Answer	4
Other	19

Major



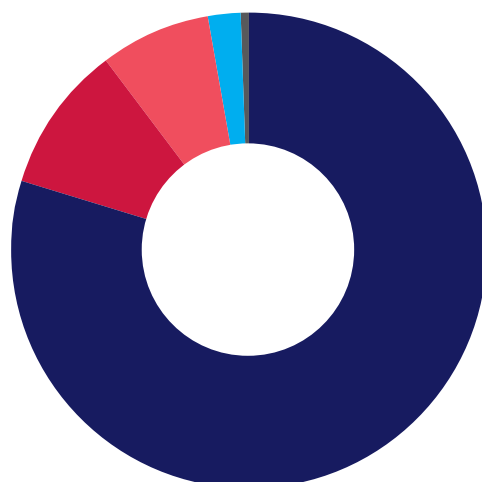
When compared to the overall population of the state, the survey respondents' ethnic/racial makeup was significantly more diverse.³ This was expected and is further evidence of the increasing diversity found at postsecondary institutions. Likewise, the experience level of the students surveyed was also diverse with a near even split between sophomores, juniors, and seniors. Respondents were most likely to be majoring in accounting (68%) followed by finance (40%). A quarter of students were double majors in Accounting/Finance.

Race/Ethnicity of Survey Respondents



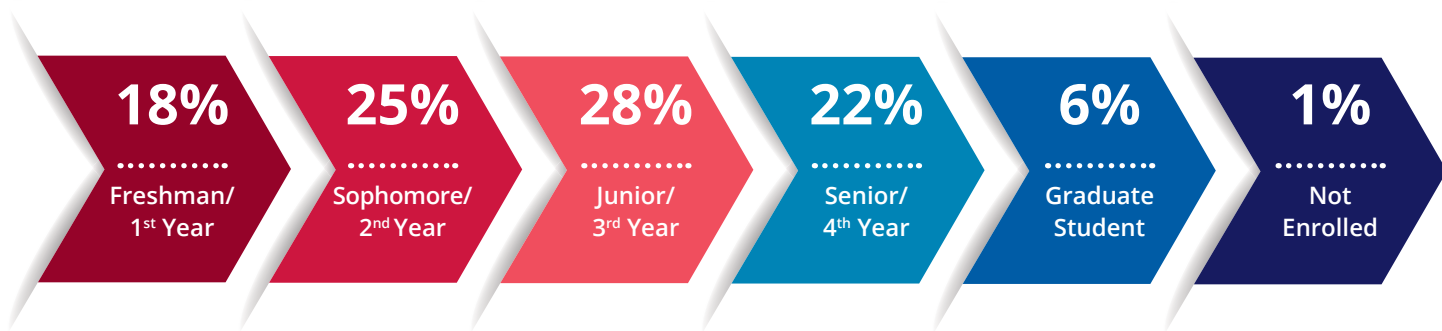
- 66% White
- 12% Hispanic/Latino
- 10% Asian/Pacific Islander
- 9% Black
- 6% Prefer Not to Say
- 1% American Indian/Alaskan Native

Race/Ethnicity of Indiana Residents



- 84% White
- 10.3% Black
- 7.9% Hispanic/Latino
- 2.9% Asian/Pacific Islander
- 0.4% American Indian/Alaskan Native

Current Year in School



3 <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/IN/PST045222>

Influencers & Experience

As the population has diversified so too have the options for communication, and influencing the next generation requires new strategies. The research found the majority of students use Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and YouTube daily. An effective communication strategy should consider distributing content tailored to each platform. Social strategies aren't, however, the most influential way to reach postsecondary students.

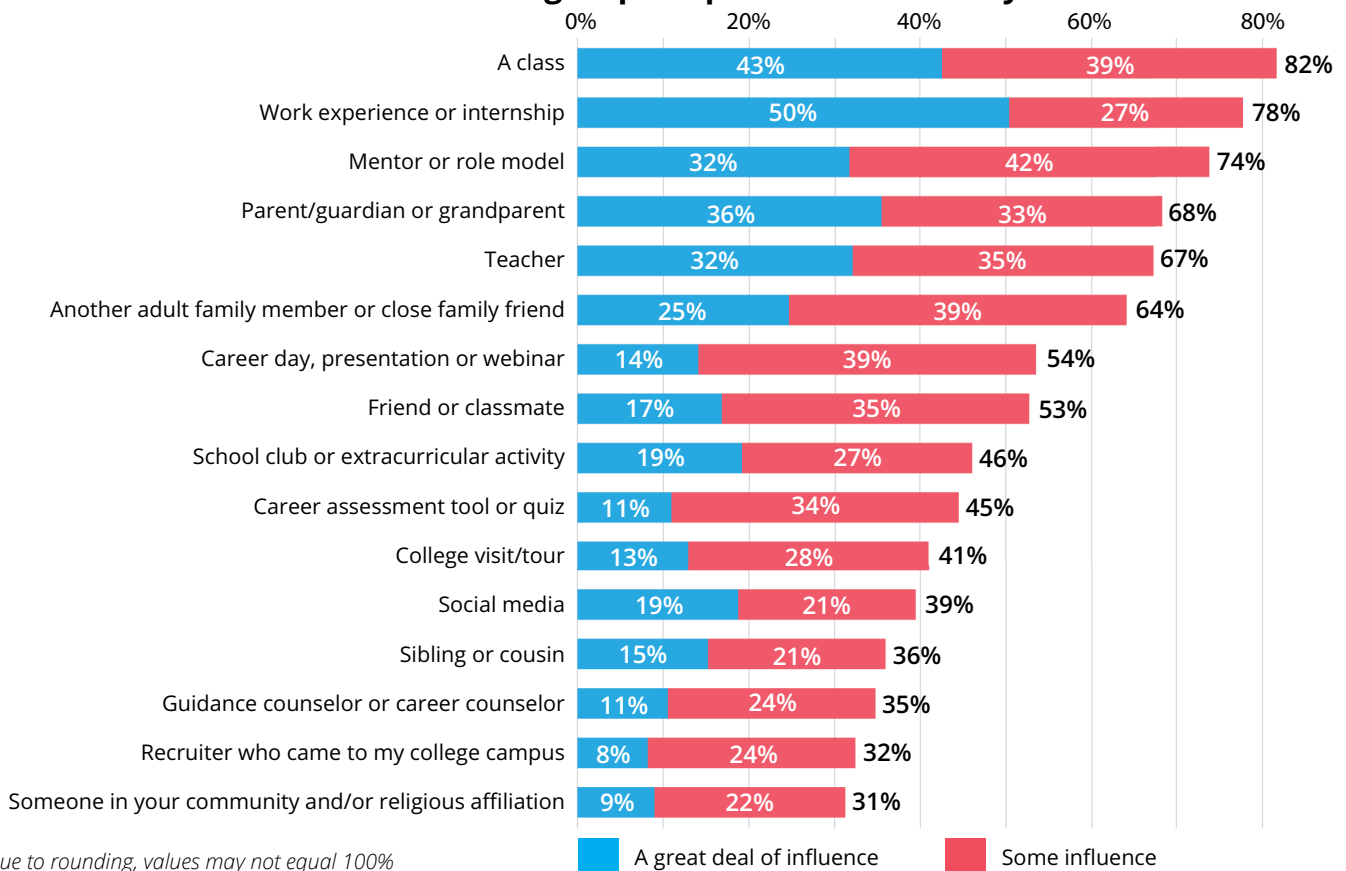
While 39.5% of respondents shared that social media has had an influence on their career choices, the Foundation's research indicates — like the CAQ's national respondents — Indiana candidates find the most influential experience is a work or internship experience, followed closely by a class or relationship with a parent or guardian. This preference for a "show and tell" experience over formal, high-level introductions that come from career assessment tools, visits from recruiters, and/or career counselors, shows the importance of well-crafted introductory courses and internship experiences.

When considering influential groups/experiences, it is important to look for differences among various demographics. The research found Indiana's Black postsecondary students are *more significantly* influenced by a parent, guardian, or grandparent, when compared to their other peer groups. This presents a unique, significant challenge. As was already noted, the profession has failed to capitalize on growth in the Black population, instead remaining steady. Perhaps this could be changed if the profession's recruiting initiatives involved the CPA candidate *and* the parent. Prioritizing the involvement of parents/parent-like groups in recruiting initiatives geared toward increasing diversity may be essential to success.

"[When I think of accounting] the classic stereotypes came to mind, but after being exposed to it and having an internship, there's a newfound respect for the profession."

—Survey Respondent

How much influence do these groups/experiences have on your career choice?

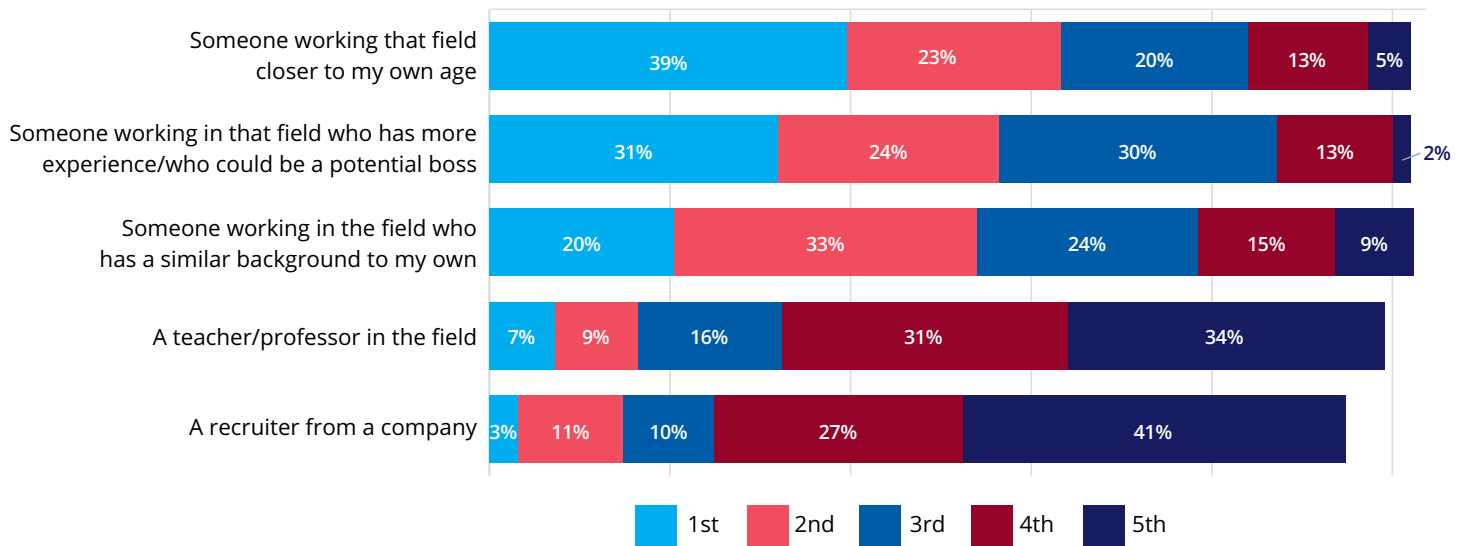


*due to rounding, values may not equal 100%

If personal, hands-on experiences are what drive interest and influence, it's not surprising that 42.6 percent of respondents have a family member or mentor who is an accountant; however, this connection can hardly become a strategy. The Foundation was curious — outside of family members — who do students want to hear from, when getting information about careers? To make presentations more successful, who should show up to get the results? Survey results show students' preference is to hear from someone working in the field who is close to their own age, followed closely by someone who could be a potential boss. A recruiter was the least preferred indicating the recruiter function is more suited to promoting a particular employer, versus a preferred profession.

“There is a shift in the profession to provide clients and employers with a better understanding of what the ‘numbers’ mean, which means stronger communication and people skills are needed.”

When you think about getting information about careers, rank who you most want to hear from.





Future Young Professionals

Brain Drain

Indiana has 85,000 teens turning 18 each year; there are 75,000 high school graduates, 42,000 students who go on to college, and 25,000 graduate and continue living in Indiana. That's a 29% workforce retention rate.⁴ What are Indiana's college accounting and business students considering when it comes to building a career in Indiana? The good news is 59% of respondents plan to work in Indiana after graduation. This retention rate far outpaces the state's average.

Further, the students who participated in the Foundation's survey indicated that they were interested in a job within the accounting profession (68%). Once these students find their way to firms and organizations throughout the state, what can employers do to ensure they stay? In other words, what's important to the workforce of tomorrow?

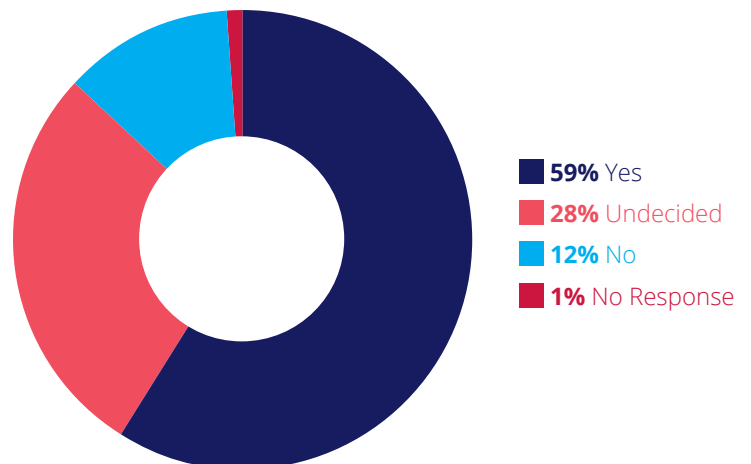
Values

A top driver is salary. Both the long-term earning potential and starting salary made the top ten. Though long-term earning earned the top spot with 94.5% of respondents sharing it was either very important or somewhat important to them personally. Job stability and/or having a job that's always in demand came in a close second, when considering factors that are both very important or somewhat important. However, if considering only *very important* factors, job stability took the top spot. Considering the timing of the survey,

this isn't surprising. Decades-high inflation and falling consumer sentiments had created fear of a recession, which likely caused students to emphasize the importance of the profession's stability.

Students place a high value on several key factors in their future careers. Not all these factors are related to compensation. Respondents placed high value on personal fulfillment and growth opportunities, 84 percent said *working in an environment that is welcoming to people of all races, ethnicities, and backgrounds* is important to all respondents, but was ranked higher in importance among non-white respondents.

Do you plan to work in Indiana after graduation?

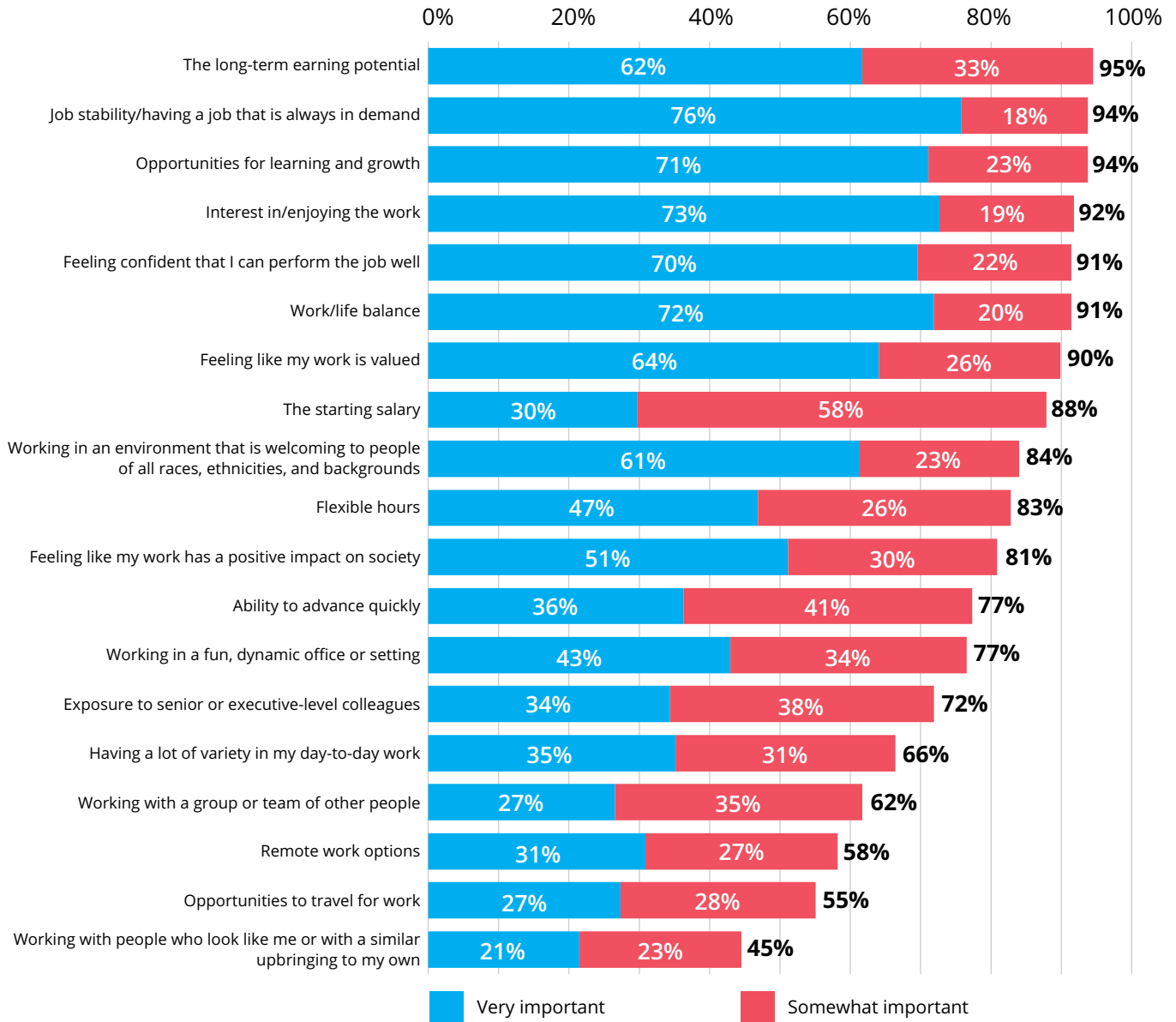


⁴ Leaking Talent Pipeline Study, Indiana Chamber of Commerce 2022

“My ultimate career goal is to work in a company whose culture aligns with my own values.”

-Survey Respondent

When you think about your future job or career, how important are each of the following to you personally?



*due to rounding, values may not equal 100%

“I think that it is a field that will always be in demand.”

-Survey Respondent

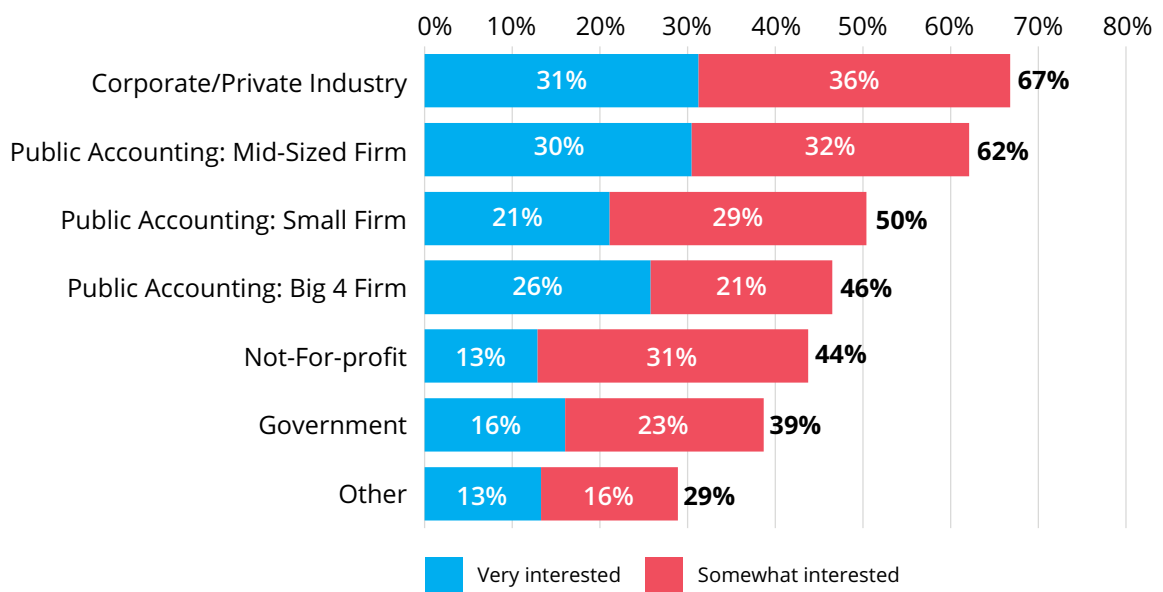
Career Goals

When asked to think long-term and describe their ultimate career goal, CFO and partner in a public accounting firm were common responses. Also, on respondents list for “ultimate career goal?” Work/life balance. The emphasis on achieving a good work-life balance as an “ultimate career goal” suggests students are aware of the potential for long hours, burnout, and job-related stress. This highlights the importance of creating supportive, healthy environments for staff. Ranking at the top of the list — alongside stability and enjoyment of the work, work/life balance ranked third as the most important factor, when considering only issues that were deemed *very important*.

“My ultimate career goal is to find fulfilling and rewarding work in the field of accounting that will enable me to positively influence the operations of a business or society and comfortably support a future family.”

–Survey Respondent

How interested are you in working in each of the following?



*due to rounding, values may not equal 100%

Conclusion

In conclusion, our research echoes the conclusions drawn by the Center for Audit Quality: to attract and retain a diverse accounting talent pipeline, we must address the perceptions and knowledge gaps that exist among students of color and business majors. Our survey reveals a genuine interest in accounting careers aligned with the CAQ’s research, yet it also uncovers the skepticism that stems from doubts about interest or aptitude for the profession.

Our insights demonstrate that accounting offers the fulfillment, stability, and culture that today’s students seek. However, we must actively dismantle the myths that shroud our profession, highlighting not only the practical benefits like job security and professional development but also the meaningful work and potential for community impact.

Moreover, our findings indicate a need for a hands-on approach, amplified by professional influence and tailored experiences, to maintain student interest throughout their educational journey. By focusing on

mentorship, experiential learning, and transparent communication about career prospects—including earning potential—we can foster a stronger, more diverse pipeline of accountants who are eager to contribute to Indiana’s economy.

As we draw this research to a close, we extend our gratitude to the Center for Audit Quality for laying the groundwork that has proved instrumental to our local market. Their insights will continue to guide us as we strive for a nationally cohesive strategy that resonates with an evolving student demographic. The partnership between the CAQ and our organization is invaluable, and together, we stand on the brink of a new and more diverse era for the accounting profession.

Thank you to the Center for Audit Quality for their pioneering work and to all those who participated in our survey, paving the way for a brighter, more inclusive future.