

2020 Kessler Foundation National Employment and Disability Survey: Recent College Graduates

SYNOPSIS

The key findings of the 2020 Kessler Foundation National Employment and Disability Survey: Recent College Graduates (KFNEDES:RCG) show that recent college graduates with disabilities engaged in career preparation activities during college and transitioned to post-college employment as successfully as recent college graduates without disabilities. Thirty years after the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, higher education appears to be paying off for people with disabilities. Yet, challenges remain, and many opportunities for improvement also emerged. Equity in higher education and employment depends not only on graduation or employment rates, but also on the characteristics and quality of educational and vocational experiences. Based on information provided by recent college graduates about their undergraduate pursuits, current jobs, and job search activities, findings from this study can inform higher education and employment policy in order to continue forward momentum toward equitable career outcomes for people with disabilities.

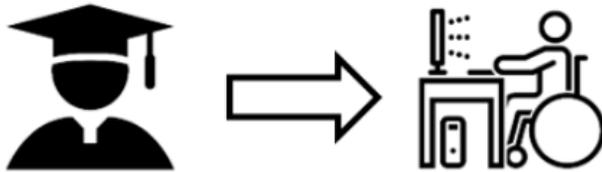


Figure 1. The KFNEDES:RCG focuses on the college-to-work transition of recent college graduates with disabilities and finds both successful career outcomes and opportunities to further advance employment equity.

OBJECTIVE

The 2020 KFNEDES:RCG is the first national survey in the United States to look across disability types and compare the higher education experiences and employment outcomes of recent college graduates with and without disabilities.

The primary objectives of the KFNEDES:RCG are as follows:

- investigate the college experiences of recent graduates (e.g., college characteristics, engagement in career preparation activities during college);
- understand the employment experiences of recent college graduates (e.g., job characteristics and quality, job satisfaction, job search barriers,);
- determine the association between college experiences and post-college employment status; and
- produce actionable information to support policies and interventions that promote equity, reduce disparities, and improve higher education and employment outcomes for people with disabilities.

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METHODS

The KFNEDS:RCG was conducted using standard, replicable survey practices. Respondents of the survey included adults ages 20 to 35 who had graduated in the past 5 years with an Associate’s degree or higher. From February 6 through March 13, 2020, a sample of recent college graduates with and without self-reported disabilities from around the country was invited to take the survey as part of Qualtrics and partners’ general population panel. Quotas were established by the researchers, so that roughly half of the sample indicated that they had at least one disability. Informed consent to participate was obtained in accordance with protocols of the University of New Hampshire Institutional Review Board. Just over 13,000 respondents (n = 13,155) consented to participate in the survey. Of those, 2,207 were excluded because they were under age 20, over age 35, or had no college degree. Another 5,338 were excluded because they had not completed their original college degree within the last 5 years. An additional 801 respondents were dropped for inattentive or rushed responding, and 71 were over quota in either the disability or no disability group. The remaining responses, which comprised the analytic sample, included 4,378 recent college graduates of whom 2,360 (49.8 percent) reported at least one disability.

EDUCATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS AND COLLEGE EXPERIENCES

One of the key findings of the KFNEDS:RCG is that college students with disabilities engaged in academic and career preparation services at least as much as college students without disabilities. This includes using college career services, participating in career-related internships or field experiences, and connecting with faculty advisors or mentors. See Figure 2.

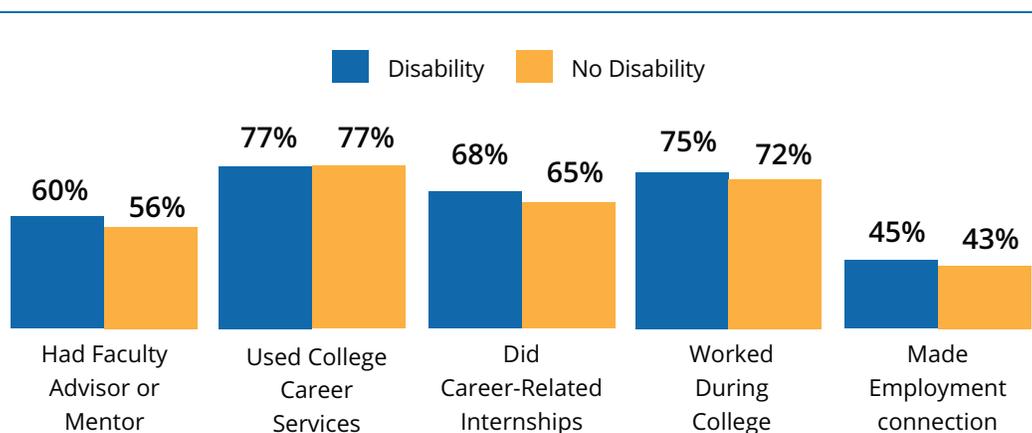


Figure 2. Recent College Graduates with and without Disabilities Engage Equivalent in Career Preparation During College

Another key finding is that community college represents an important pathway to employment for recent college graduates with disabilities. Compared to recent college graduates without disabilities, recent graduates with disabilities were more likely ever to have attended community college (50 percent vs. 44 percent), and to have earned their primary degree from community college (18 percent vs. 15 percent). Recent college graduates with disabilities were more likely than recent graduates without disabilities to take courses at a community college during high school (13 percent vs. 11 percent) or in the course of earning a four-year degree from a different institution (12 percent vs. 10 percent).

POST-COLLEG EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES

People with and without disabilities who graduated college in the past five years were clearly striving to work and achieving positive employment outcomes. Regardless of disability status, the majority (79 percent) were currently employed at the time of the survey, and an additional 10 percent had worked at some point since they graduated college. Of those who had not worked since college, recent graduates with disabilities were more likely than recent graduates without disabilities to say that they had ever held a job. This means that recent graduates without disabilities were more likely than recent graduates with disabilities to say they had never worked. Of the respondents who had never worked or not worked since graduation, about half were looking for a job.

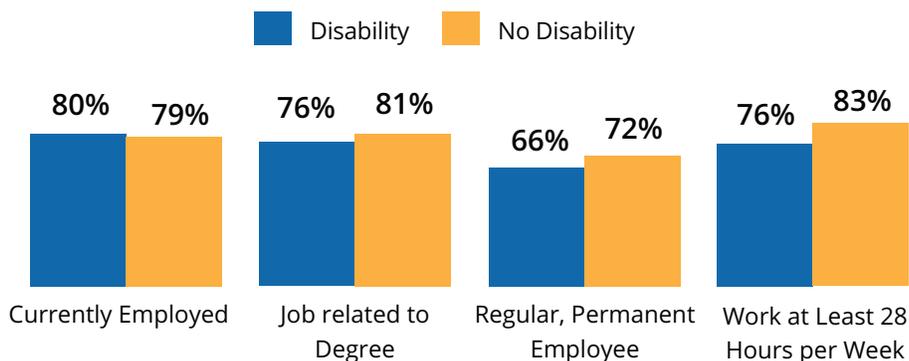


Figure 3. Recent College Graduates with and without Disabilities Transition to Work After College

Despite that respondents with and without disabilities were equivalently likely to be currently employed, key differences between the groups emerged in both job characteristics and job quality. Figure 3 illustrates that recent graduates with disabilities were less likely than recent graduates without disabilities to work at a job that was related to their college degree or hold regular, permanent positions. Instead, they more likely to work as consultants or freelancers, to work intermittently or on-call, or to be paid by a temporary agency. On average, recent graduates with disabilities also worked fewer hours per week. About three in four reported working at least 28 hours per week.

Among job seekers who were not currently employed, the number one barrier, common to recent graduates with and without disabilities looking for jobs, was not enough training (46 percent). Barriers more prevalent among job seeking graduates with disabilities than those without included employers assuming they could not do the job (37 percent vs. 25 percent), being offered less pay than others in a similar job (31 percent vs. 24 percent) and negative attitudes on the part of employers (31 percent vs. 21 percent).

IMPACT OF COLLEGE EXPERIENCES ON POST-COLLEGE EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Health and related sciences was the most common major among recent college graduates with and without disabilities. Among people with disabilities, health science majors were less likely to be employed after graduation (73 percent) than people with other majors (81 percent), and the same was true of social science majors. However, people with disabilities who majored in education, another of the top five most common majors, were more likely to be employed (85 percent) than recent graduates with disabilities from other major fields of study (79 percent).

IMPACT OF COLLEGE EXPERIENCES ON POST-COLLEGE EMPLOYMENT STATUS (CONTINUED)

Recent graduates with and without disabilities were more likely to be currently employed after graduation if they had participated in career-related internships as students. Of those who completed any paid or unpaid internships while students, 83 percent were currently working, compared to 71 percent who had not done internships. Post college employment was also more likely among those who had worked for wages at a typical job as undergraduates. Among people with and without disabilities who had worked for wages, 85 percent were currently employed, compared to 69 percent of those who had not worked during school. This effect was even stronger (89 percent) if the work during college had been related to the students' intended field.

CLOSING COMMENTS

This Executive Summary highlights the major findings of the 2020 KFNEDS:RCG. Many more analyses are planned for these data, which will add to our understanding of the factors contributing to the successful college-to-work transition of people with disabilities. Access the full report of main findings at KesslerFoundation.org/KFSurvey2020.

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