

BUILDING THE BRIDGE

FROM EDUCATOR TO EMPLOYER

A guide for innovators looking to embrace the new world of experiential learning in the wake of the global pandemic.



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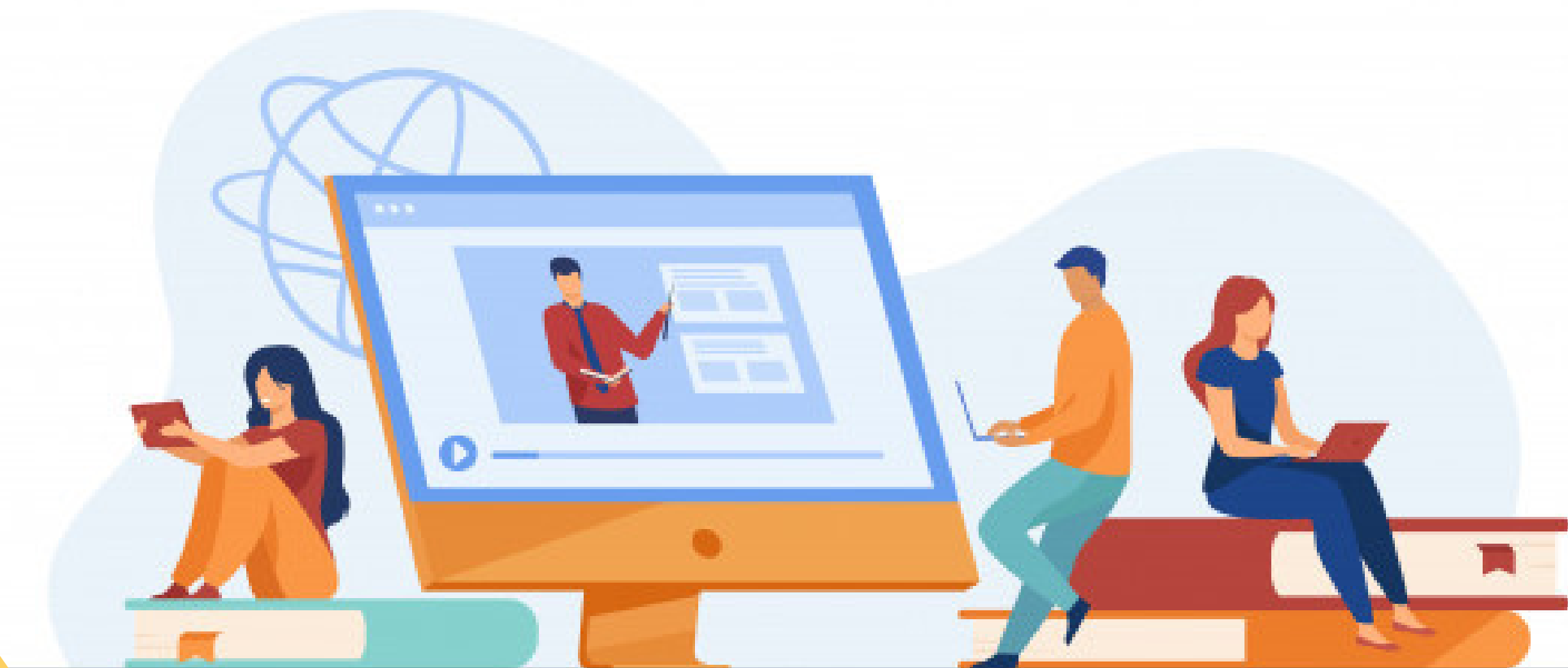
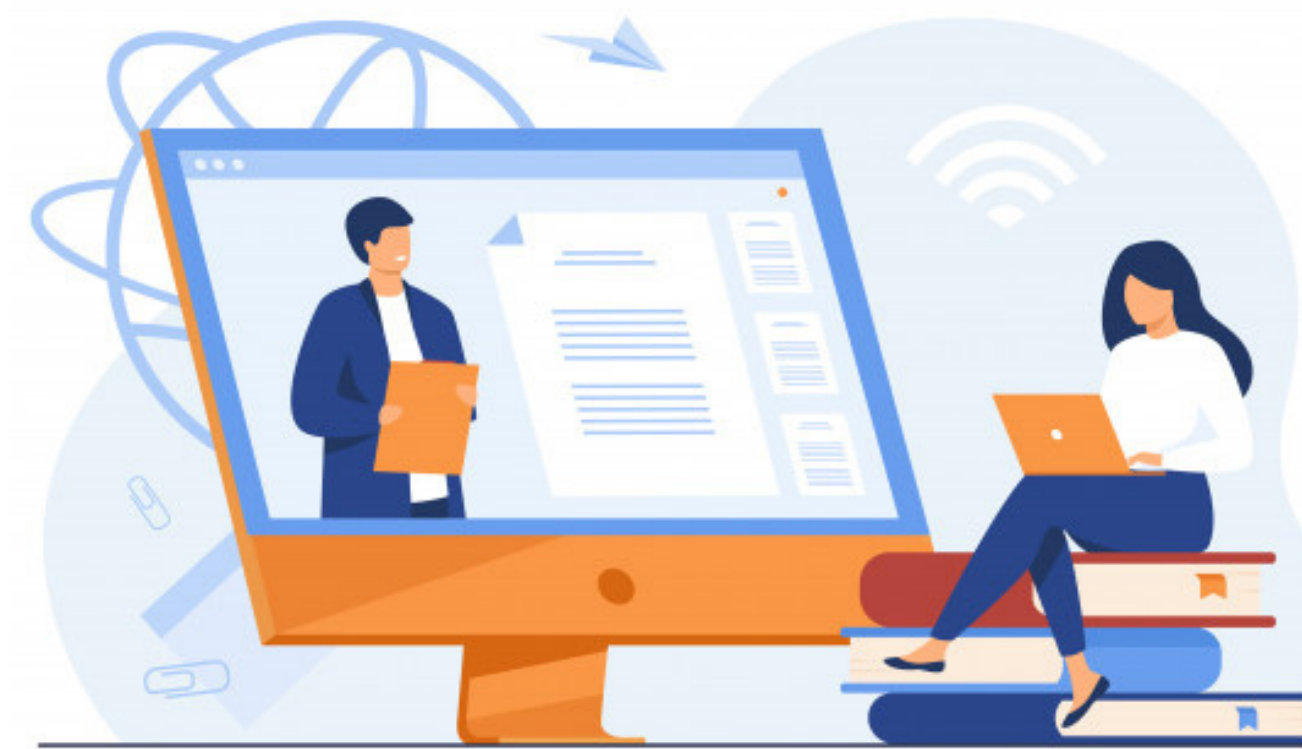


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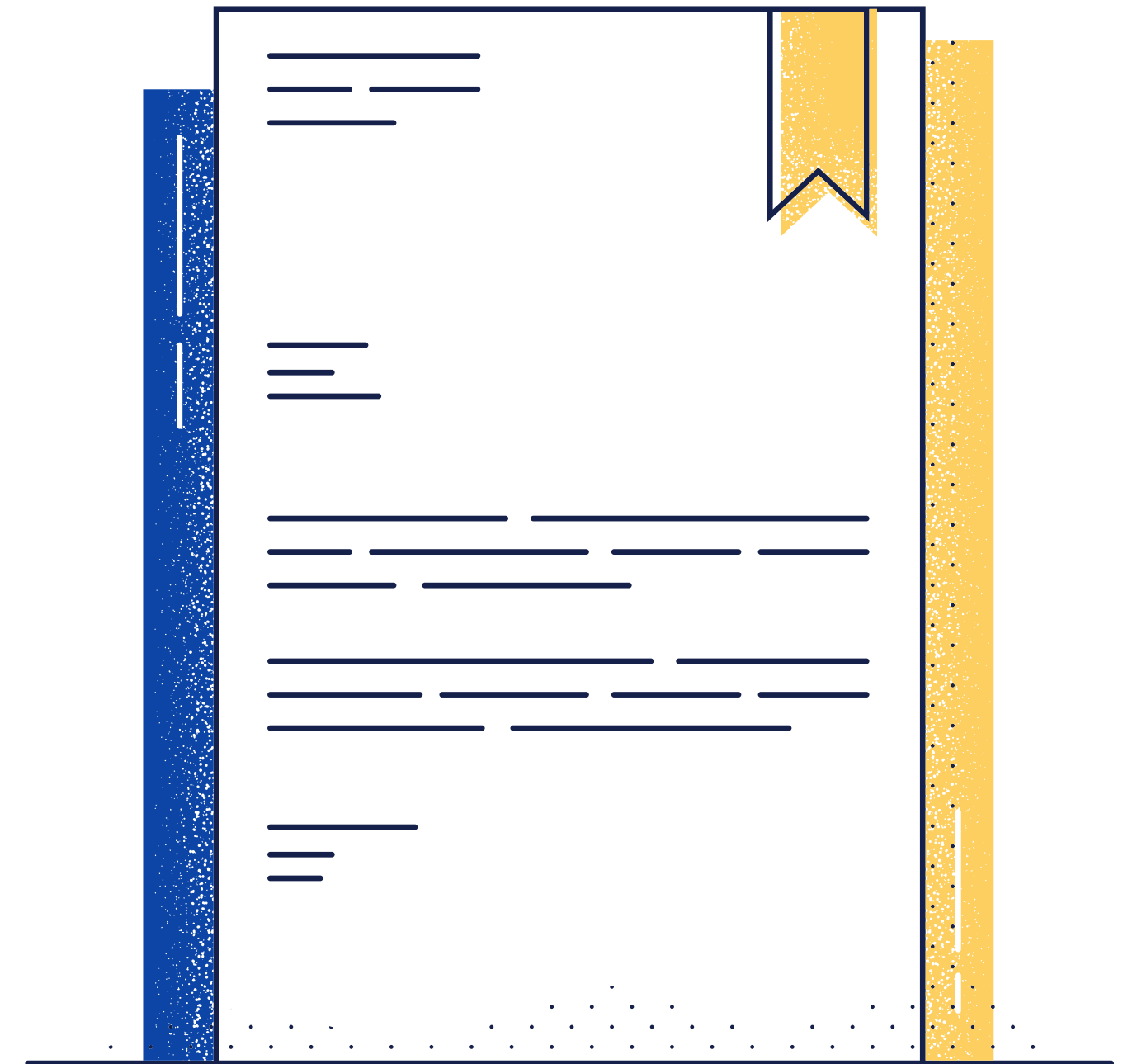


Introduction

Online classes, remote internships, virtual job interviews.
It's 2020, and a virus has forced higher education to reinvent itself virtually overnight.

As we debate the path forward for universities and high schools, we thought it would be a good idea to revisit a medieval system of education that birthed many of the modern practices of imparting knowledge that we are familiar with today.

Apprenticeships were an age-old tradition of education in the ancient world that allowed young people to work alongside a master and build expertise in a new trade. This was an entirely transactional relationship; while young apprentices were given the chance to hone skills they would otherwise never have been able to perfect, their mentors benefitted from valuable labor.

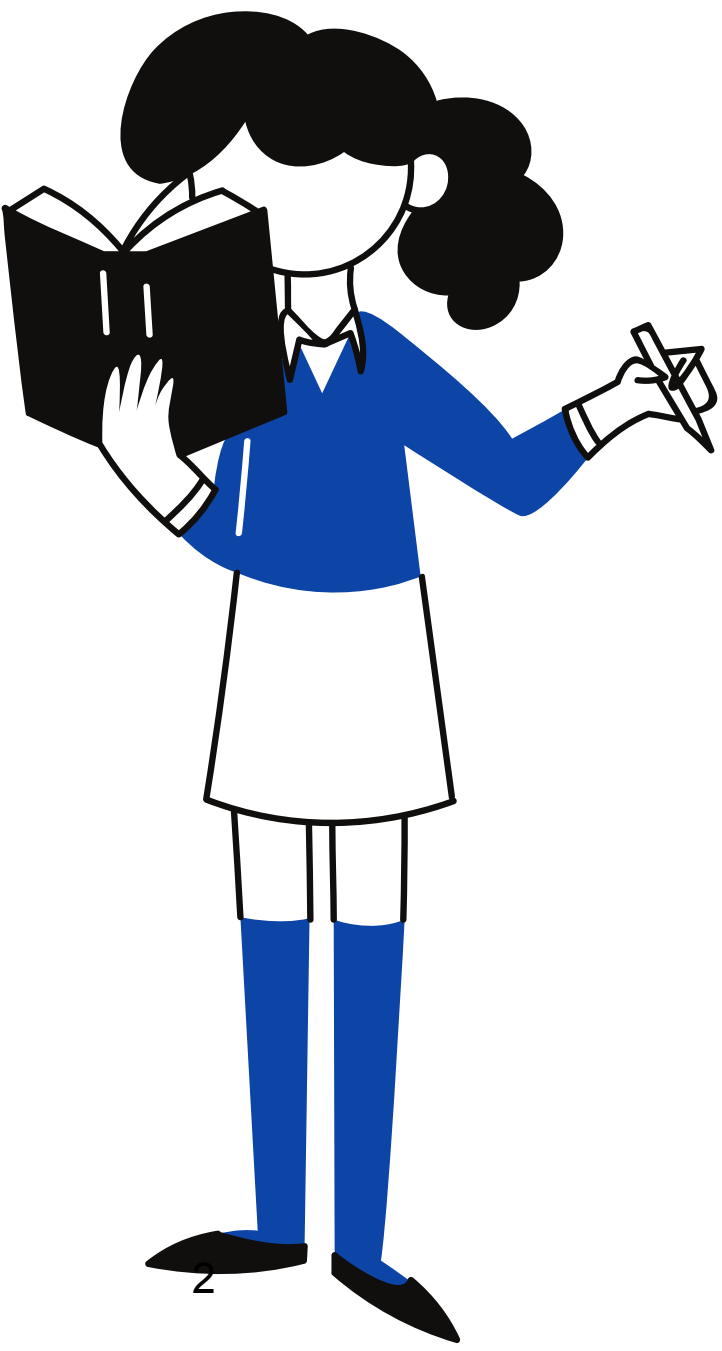


As learned society developed, the upwardly mobile exchanged hours spent whittling wood or working a forge for nobler pursuits - theology, philosophy, law and medicine - giving rise to Europe's most ancient universities.

13th century universities on the continent licensed guilds to teach prescribed texts that culminated in the award of a degree titled "master" or "doctor", which signified a student's admittance into the teaching profession.

But here's the catch: the bachelor's degree was never meant to be more than a mere stage towards mastership, a signalling of the completion of the first stage of academic life. Fast forward to the 21st century, where a four-year college degree has been ingrained as the gateway to a secure future, despite the increasing irrelevance of theoretical study in modern business.

Some educators in the United States, to varying degrees, have been working to make amends and incorporate experiential learning into the university experience, so that graduates can leverage job-ready skills when they step into the working world.



While other developed nations, like the United Kingdom, have seen a resurgence in modern apprenticeship programs, the United States has lagged behind in institutionalizing the concept of getting work experience as part of the educational experience.

Students that don't have the support of an elite university that can give them access to a network of employers are largely left to figure out how to secure internships or work experience opportunities on their own.

COVID19 has exposed fallacies behind current practice and strengthened the movement to incorporate technology and hands-on learning into the university experience.



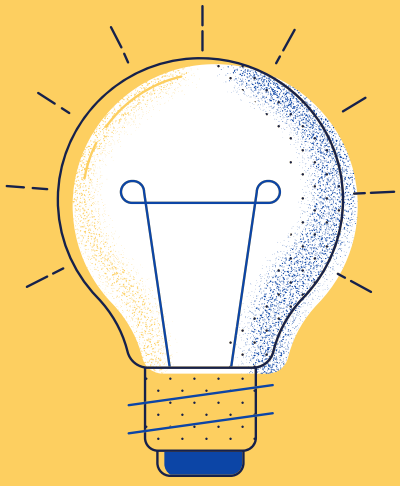
This shouldn't surprise us: historically, some of the biggest career advances have been made in times of strife. After all, the US owes the large scale employment and recruitment of women to periods such as World War II and 1970's stagflation, while the 2008 financial crisis led to a surge in LinkedIn use.

As we stand on the brink of both an upheaval and a renaissance in the education industry, precipitated by the COVID19 pandemic, we are given a once-in-a-generation opportunity to redesign both secondary and higher education into an experience that straddles the worlds of academia and industry and truly offers the most value to students.





A Paradigm Shift to Remote Work



While the early days of the Great Lockdown of 2020 will fondly be remembered for Dalgona coffee and singing on balconies, they will also go down in history as the time corporations had to swiftly adapt to transitioning employees en masse to working from home.

Almost overnight, employers had to make decisions about what virtual communication platforms to use, standardize video conferencing options, troubleshoot tech issues and familiarize teams with digital tools.

HR departments sunk into long discussions - via Zoom, of course - about virtual happy hours and how to set a tone for workplace culture from a distance. Project leads devised new ways to assess productivity and keep tabs on their teams. Employees located the best lit areas of their homes and set up backgrounds that would make them look professional on video calls.

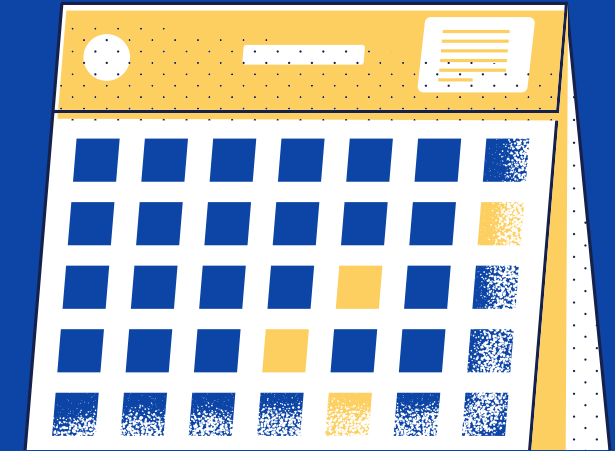


And so, the great remote work experiment took flight.

After several months of experimenting with what the future of the workplace would look like, scores of companies are starting to commit to a long term shift to remote working. The promise of cutting costs on renting glassy buildings at the center of the world's priciest cities, and access to a location-agnostic talent pool have made recruiting pundits declare that we've only just scratched the surface when it comes to taking work online.

Big Tech was the first to catch on. Twitter and Square decided their employees could work remotely forever. Facebook announced a 10-year plan to move most of its employees to remote work. Shopify said it was going all in, with no plans to bring people back to working in offices. Even companies in "traditional" industries like Nationwide jumped on the bandwagon, with the exception of a few corporate offices.

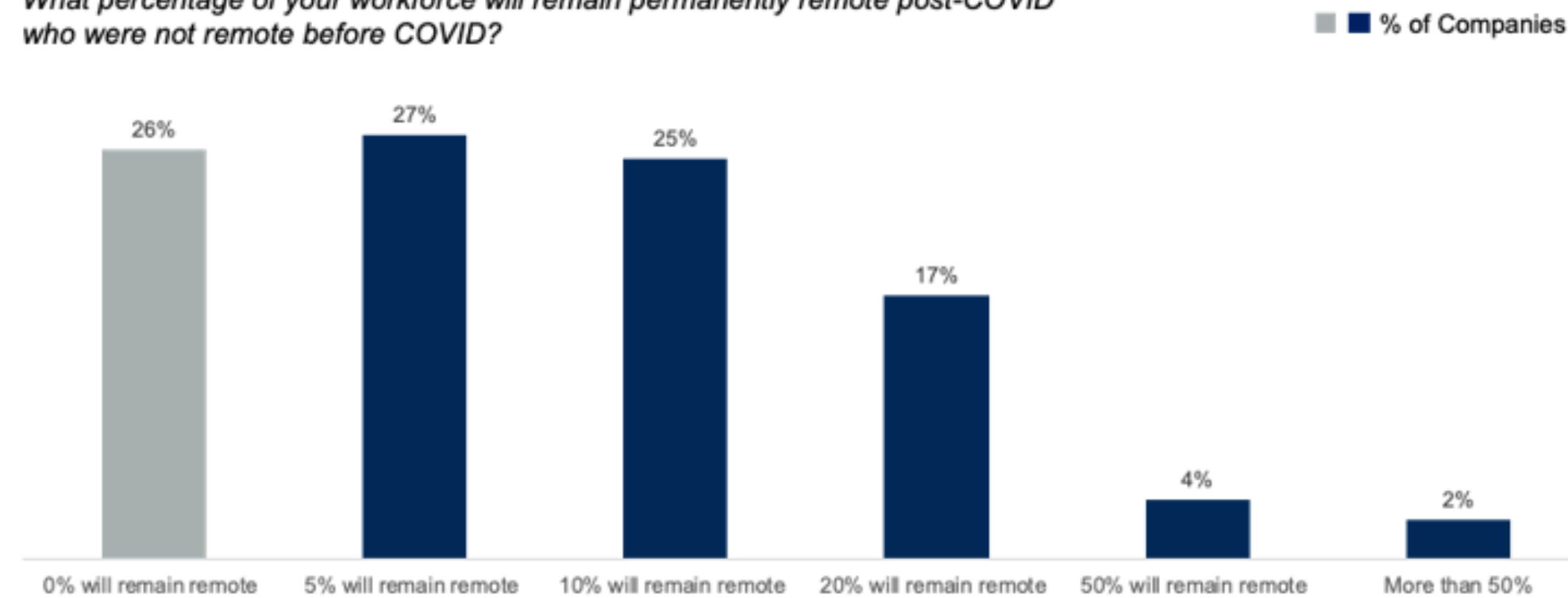




A recent Gartner survey of 317 CFOs and finance leaders found that 74% of companies plan to shift “at least 5% of their previously on-site workforce to permanently remote positions post-COVID 19.” Nearly one-quarter (23%) plan to convert at least 20% of previously on-site employees into permanent telecommuters.

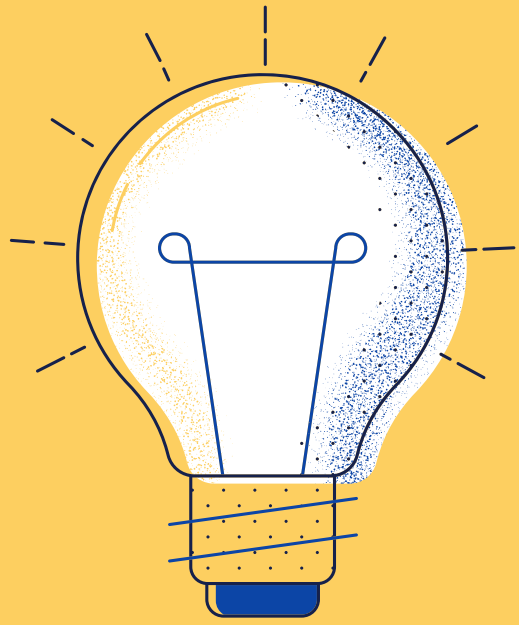
74% of Companies Plan to Permanently Shift to More Remote Work Post COVID-19

What percentage of your workforce will remain permanently remote post-COVID who were not remote before COVID?



Source: Gartner (April 2020)

And according to BCG, companies on the whole expect about 40% of employees to utilize a remote working model in the future. Further, 37% of companies expect that more than a quarter of all employees will work in hybrid models that combine remote and onsite work.



COVID19 has clearly disrupted the way we work, which means it must disrupt the way we prepare our workforce to work.

So here's the big question: how does higher education need to adapt its offering to remain relevant?

Michael Griffiths, who leads the learning consulting practice at Deloitte, believes **experiential learning** is the way to go.

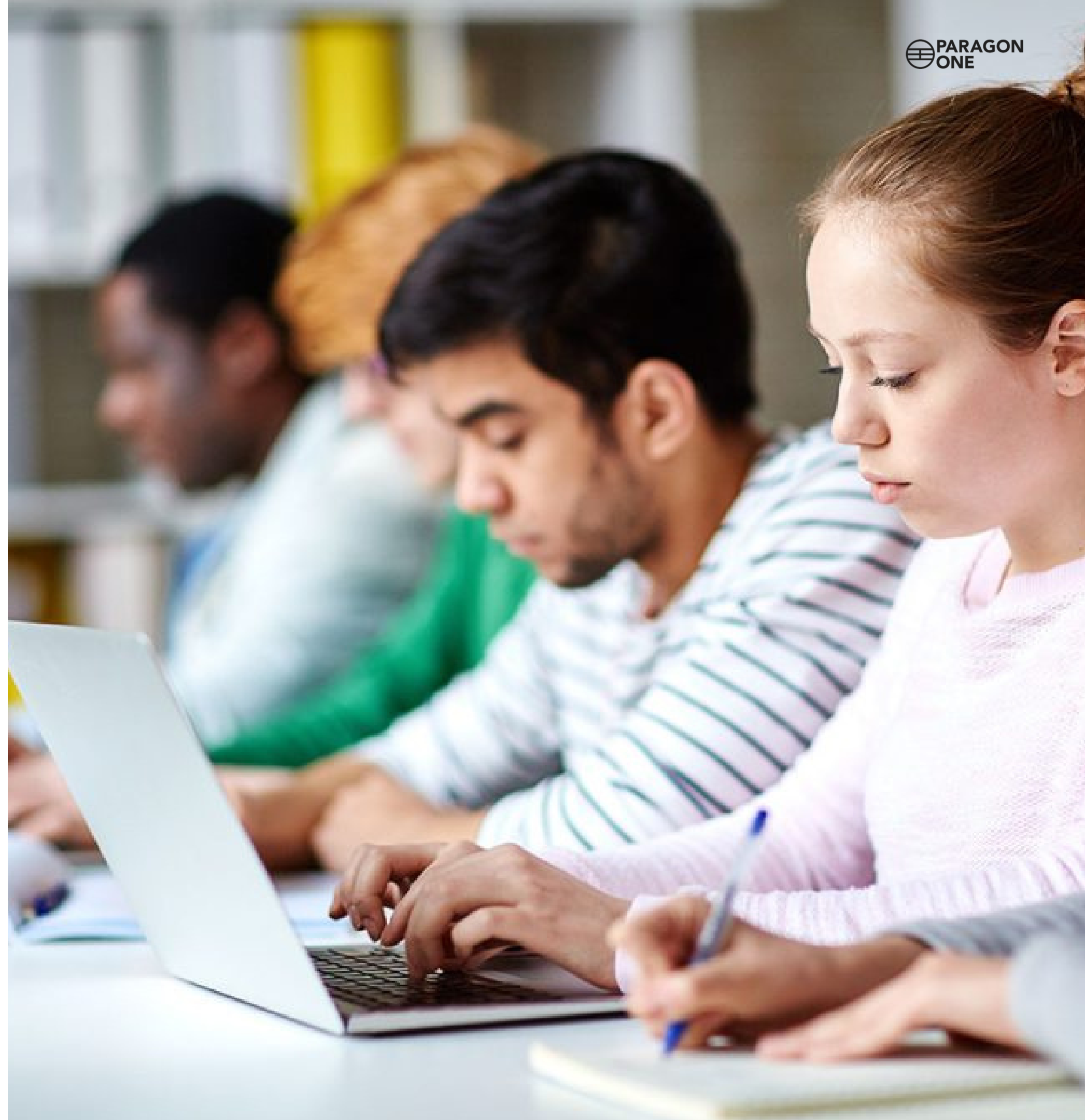
“Educators have to catch up with commercial organizations, who are way ahead when it comes to delivering experiential learning and recognizing its value,” he says, noting that in many cases major organizations, from Google to Apple, no longer require candidates to demonstrate competency by having a degree.

“Our top advice to universities in a post-COVID world? **Break your business model.** There's still value you can offer, but not in the way you've traditionally done so. **The four year degree where you have historically made your money is not going to be sustainable, but offer an agile, micro degree and there is significant value and opportunity in the market for you.** Schools really need to invest in virtual technology, rather than continue to brand their campuses.”

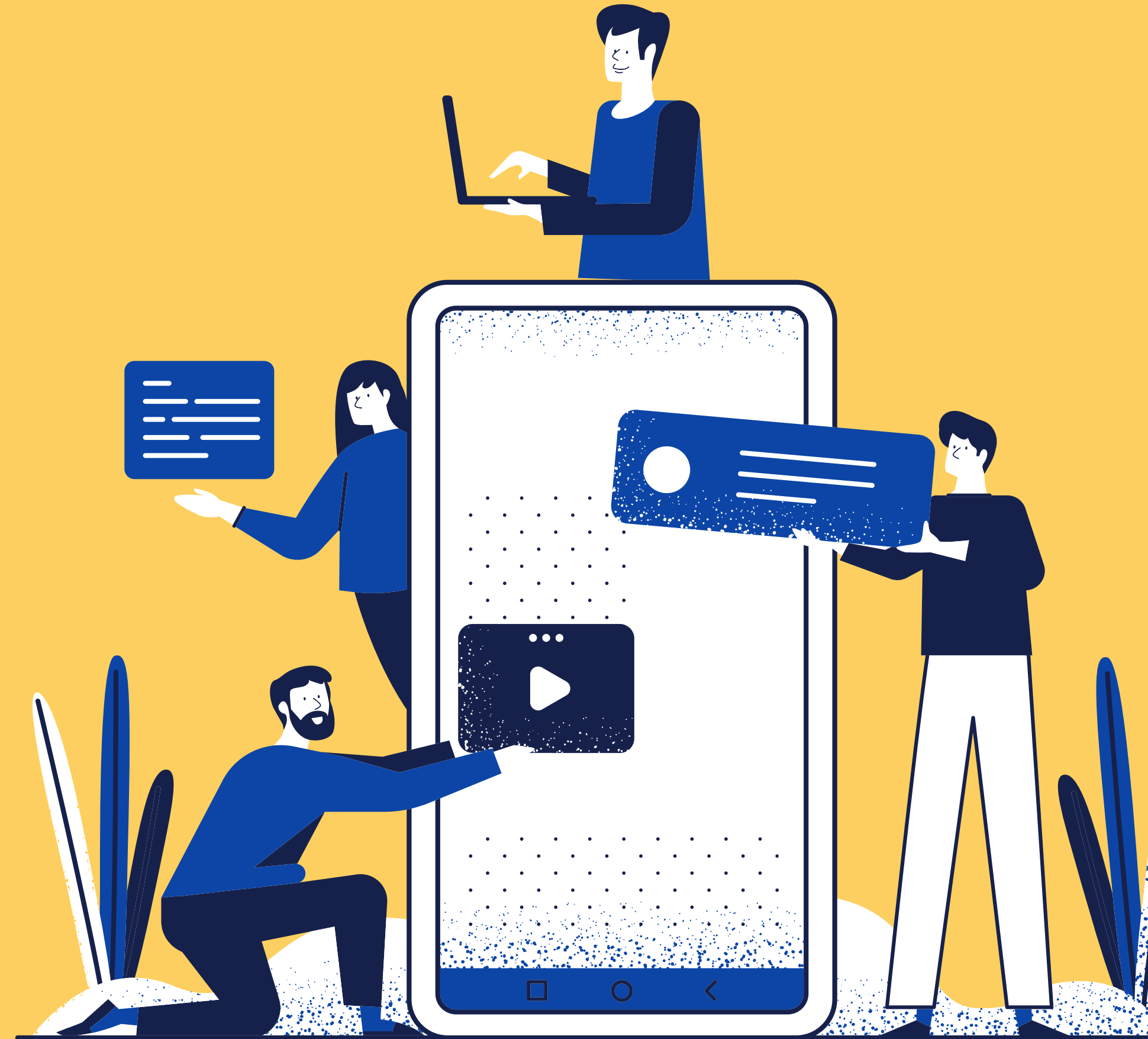
Skills that are of value in the workplace are constantly changing and **53% of organizations expect that half of their workforce will need to be reskilled in the next three years.**

“If you’re doing a three or four year course on a hard skill, chances are by the time you finish, industry requirements have changed dramatically,” Griffiths says.

“That’s why **organizations have realized they need to be hiring people based on capabilities rather than qualifications.** They recruit people who can demonstrate resilience, creativity, innovativeness and critical thinking. So when we consult with education groups, we tell them to come up with ways to embed skills of that sort into the programs they offer, so they create employable student bodies.”



Fall 2020: Beta Testing The Future of Education

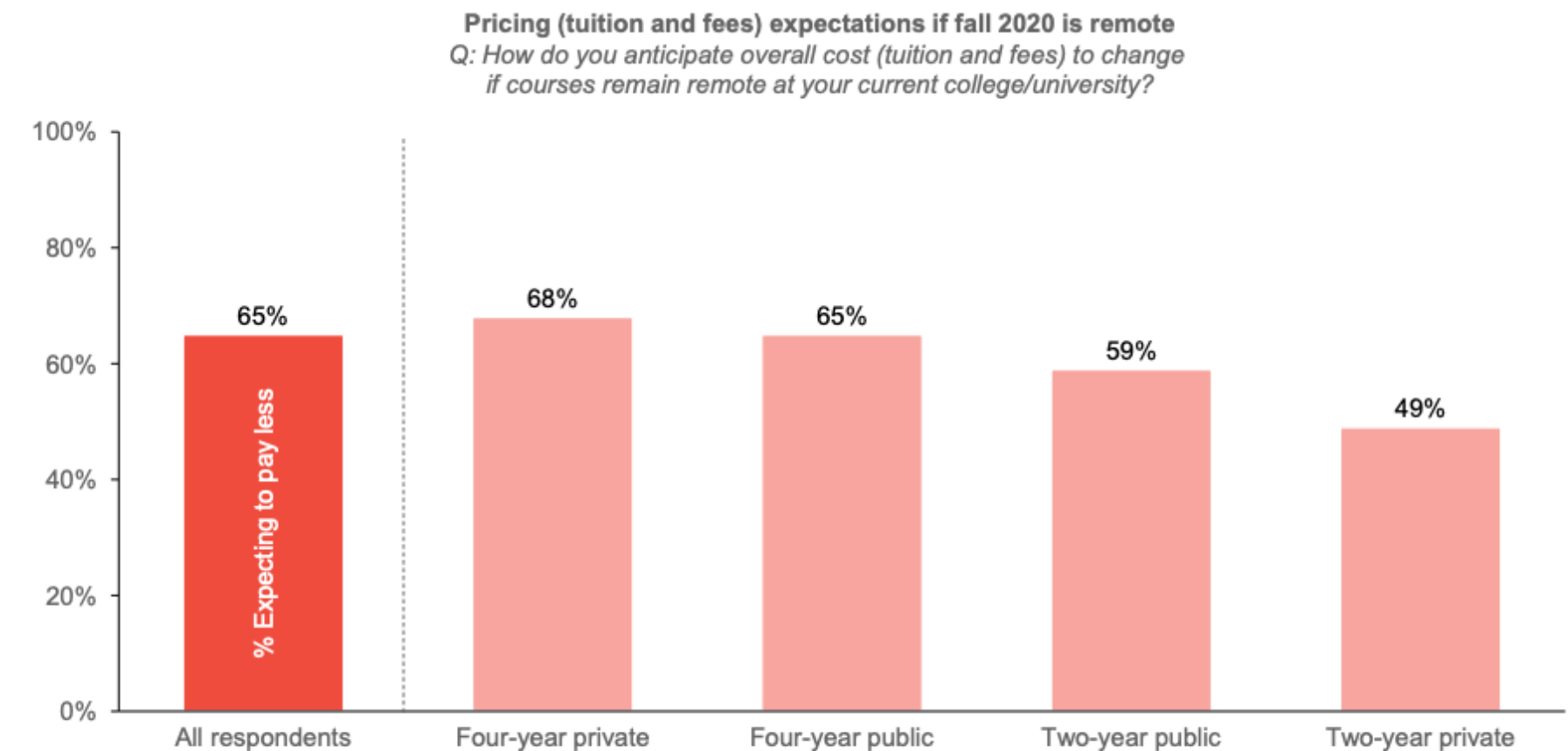


As universities and schools around the world open their gates (virtually) for the fall semester this year, students and parents are apprehensive about the quality of education they will be able to deliver.

A survey from McKinsey found nearly half of high school seniors in the United States are likely to defer enrollment, or look for a different school if faced with remote learning this fall. EY- Parthenon reports that 50% to 70% of college students expect tuition discounts if online lectures are the new normal this semester.

Expectations for fall term and pricing

Approximately 50% to 70% of respondents, depending on institution type, expect tuition and fees to be reduced if courses remain remote



Source: EY-Parthenon



Fewer students can afford to go to college simply because it is the natural next step in their education, so they care far more about career outcomes. While universities might not be able to give students the full college experience this fall, those that are quick to recognize students' newfound priorities are best-placed to tackle the disruption they are seeing.

A report by the Institute for the Future estimated that nothing less than 85% of the jobs that will exist in 2030 haven't even been invented yet. Further, the World Economic Forum's "The Future of Jobs Report" estimates that 133 million new jobs may emerge by 2022, which means that innovations will create 58 million more jobs than they displace.

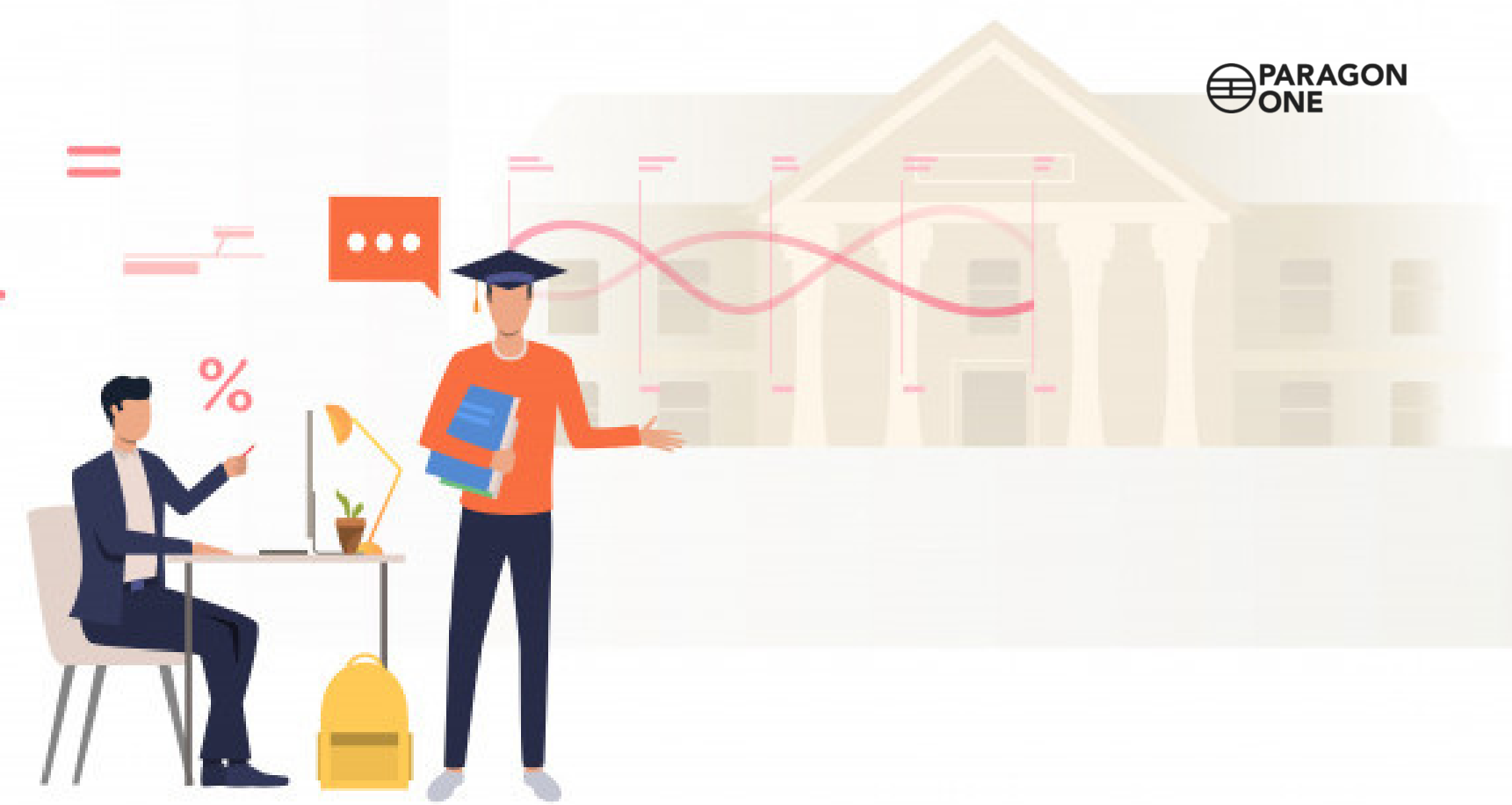


Universities that want to continue to be seen as pathways to emerging careers have to be laser focused on preparing students for them and must play a bigger role in facilitating co-ops, externships and project-based learning through industry partnerships, so students build updated and relevant skills.

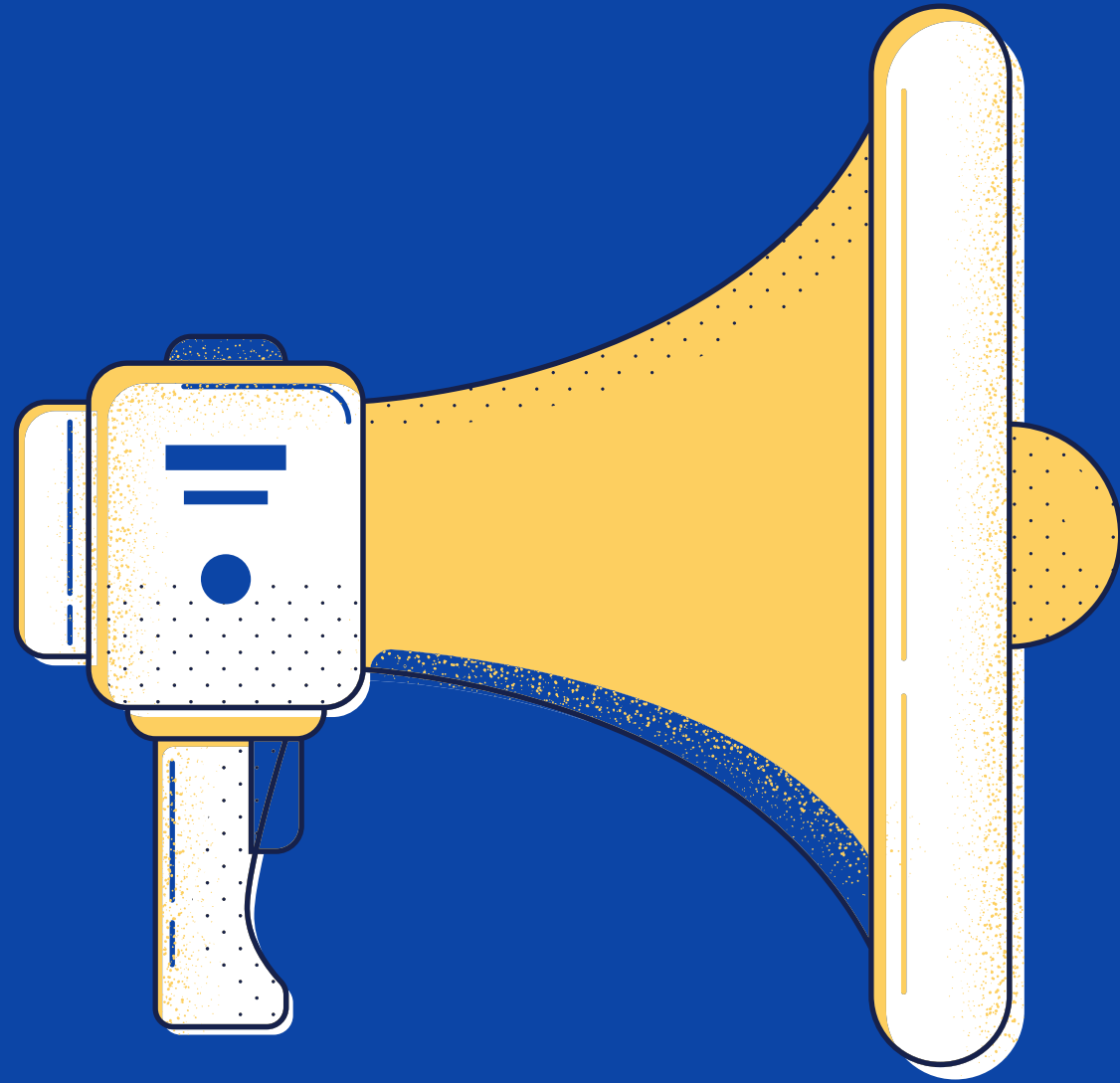
They also need to reimagine virtual learning - merely converting an in-person lecture to an online webinar by making the professor stand in front of a camera is not the optimum way to engage students who are attending university outside the classroom.

COVID19 has accelerated the pace of innovation in higher education, but has also allowed schools to test what aspects of a virtual education might continue to be in demand after the pandemic. Being able to deliver greater flexibility via online classes, for example, might be just one way that schools can adapt to continue to attract students and receive endowments in future.

Julia Freeland Fisher, Director of Education at the Clayton Christensen Institute, who has studied disruption in higher education for a decade, notes that the business model for US universities is “very much broken”.



“However, institutions like Arizona State University, Southern New Hampshire University and Western Governors University have differentiated themselves by offering fully virtual and competency-based courses. They’ve also been fairly forward thinking about integrating employer demand into their curriculum.”



Career Centers Reimagined

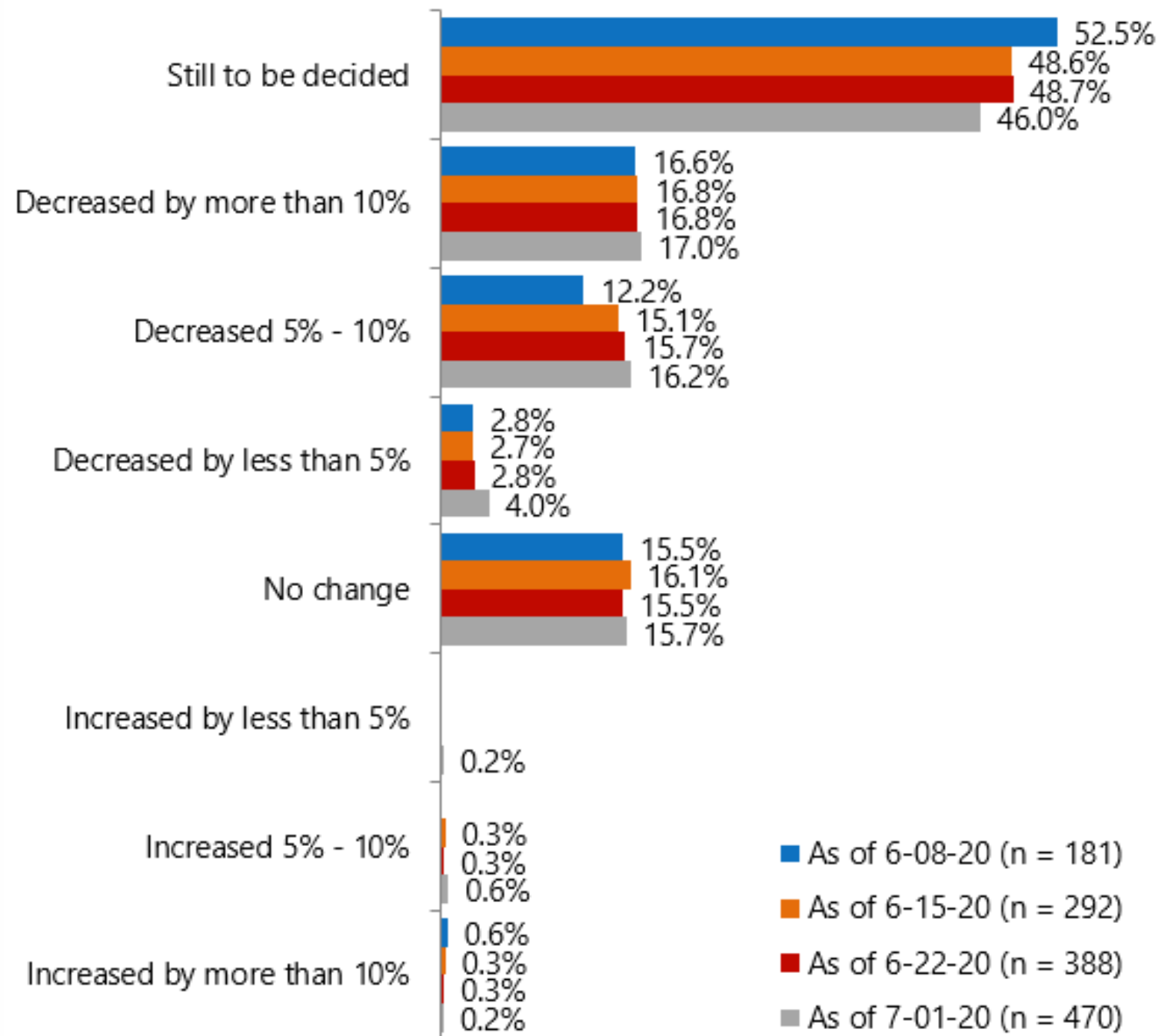
Career centers in the higher education ecosystem have traditionally been known as the office where students go to seek advice from counselors about their long-term career plans.

Yet, fewer than 20% of undergraduates reach out to their school's career centers for advice on finding jobs or identifying and applying to graduate programs, although such advice ranks among a center's most valuable services, according to a 2017 Strada-Gallup survey.

As the global economy reels from the impact of months of lockdown due to COVID19, career outcomes as a consequence of a college degree matter far more.



Budget Changes For Fall 2020



Source: NACE June 2020 Coronavirus Quick Poll

Unfortunately, data from NACE gathered since the pandemic began, shows that **17% of career centers report that their budgets have been reduced by more than 10% for fall 2020, versus last year.**

So how can career centers prove their worth to universities and establish themselves as an important driver of student enrollment?

Career centers need to be focused on making investments that clearly translate to employment outcomes for students.

Corporate America is increasingly demanding work experience prior to graduation. A high GPA and a strong academic track record might have been enough to receive a job offer straight out of college in the past, but today's employers are more keen to see evidence that a candidate has problem-solving and communication skills and some real work experience before committing to a full-time hire.

This means that career centers at high schools and colleges need to establish themselves as the best pathway to high-quality work experience opportunities for students.





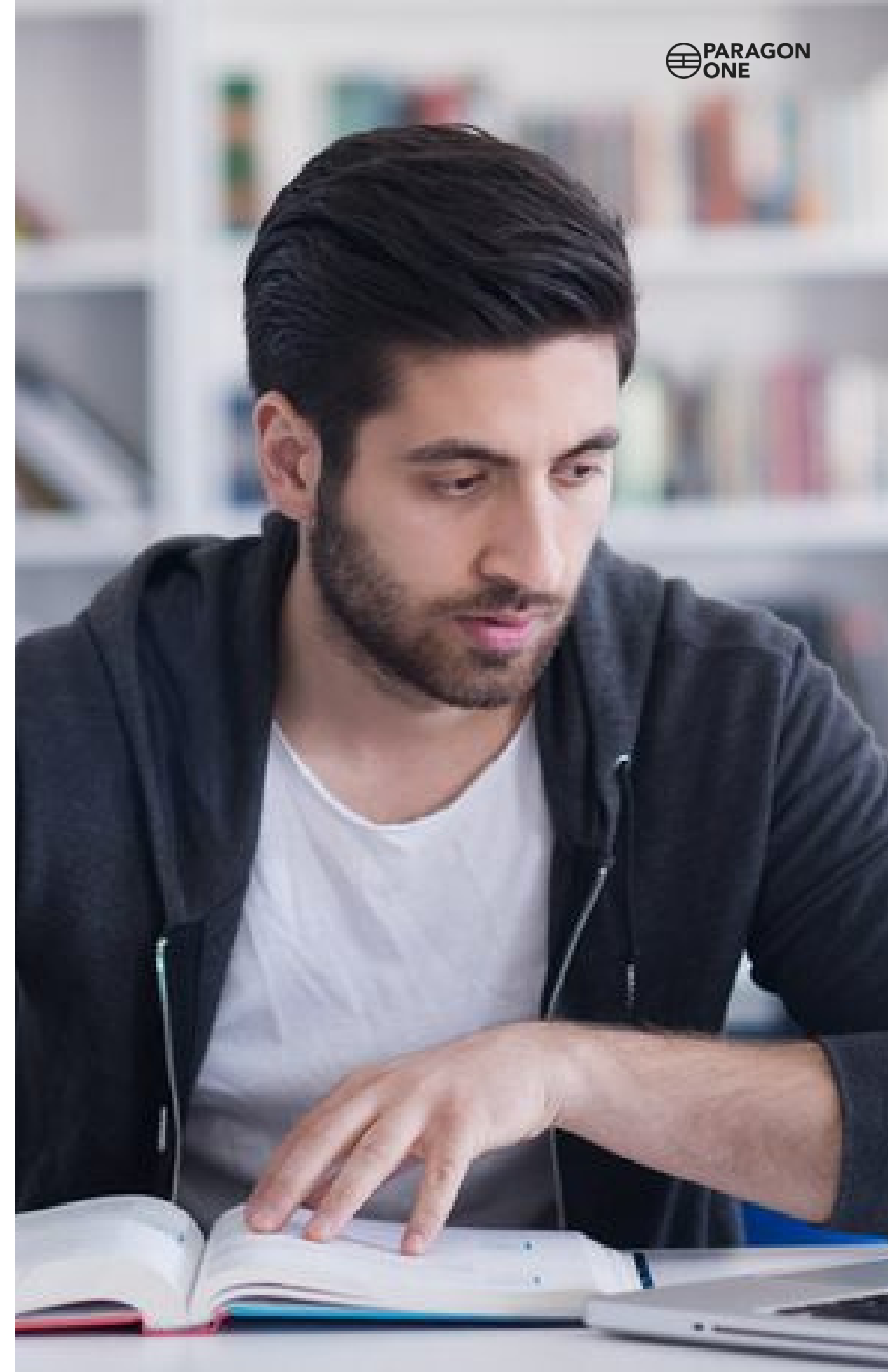
Career centers of the future will be called upon to take greater responsibility in matching students with internships and forming partnerships with industry to bring experiential learning opportunities to the student body, while “support services” like resume-editing and career counseling sessions will become increasingly redundant.

Securing a first internship is a struggle for all students, but those who don't hail from backgrounds that have given them the social capital and networking opportunities to get a recruiter to take a second look at their resumes must rely almost entirely on career centers providing them with access to employers or pay for third-party resources like consultants or recruiters.

While the role of career centers has been evolving for some years now, 2020 has made it very clear that they need to think well beyond putting internship postings on the school job portal in order to truly contribute value.

With many internships being cancelled due to COVID19, career centers that already have established virtual work experience projects for their students were best equipped to support them in the ways they needed. Moreover, as the world gravitates towards a new normal of remote work, career centers that recognize their students need opportunities to demonstrate to future employers that they possess remote work skills stand a better chance of making their student body more attractive to campus recruiters. As companies grow culturally and geographically diverse, colleges need to play a role in preparing the future generation of employees to work alongside remote team members from around the world.

In order to stay competitive, career centers must move away from a broadly advisory role and actively seek ways to provide all students with access to learning experiences that will one day become a mainstay of the overall university experience.





Even with limited budgets, career centers can leverage alumni networks or invest in internship, externship, work shadowing, apprenticeship and/or co-op programs that can help close the opportunity gap for students of all backgrounds.

An active move towards investing in better career support for students also stands to benefit schools themselves in the long run. Students who feel supported beyond the academic setting, in areas like mental health and career services, feel more emotionally connected to the school community and are more likely to be active in alumni philanthropy.

A career center with a reputation for truly delivering career outcomes also helps boost enrollment numbers at universities.

Over 80% of students say that getting a job is a key factor in their decision to attend university - one can only imagine that number rising in a world teetering on the brink of an economic downturn.

Does the US Still Appeal to International Students?



While the 1.1 million international students that study in the United States account for just about 5% of the total student body at US colleges, they contribute over \$45 billion to the country's economy.

Colleges in the United States have long courted students from around the globe, who pay higher fees that indirectly subsidize tuition for domestic students, and make significant contributions to the revenue of local businesses on campus.

With COVID19 disrupting plans for many international students who had hoped to start a new semester on US campuses this fall, higher education institutions are concerned that a system that has long oiled the US economy might be on the verge of a breakdown.

“There are multiple things happening at the same time that are deterring international students from coming to the United States,” Jenny Lee, professor of educational policy studies at the University of Arizona, said.





“On top of health concerns, visa and travel restrictions because of COVID19, there have been anti-immigration proposals from the US government, H1B work visa restrictions that directly affect international students who want to work in the US and tension between US and China.”

Experiential Learning: A Hail Mary for Higher Education

While international students choose to study in the United States for a whole host of reasons - to immerse themselves in its culture, to enjoy sprawling campuses, to expand their social network - **the star attraction of an American degree clearly remains its potential to provide access to American jobs.**

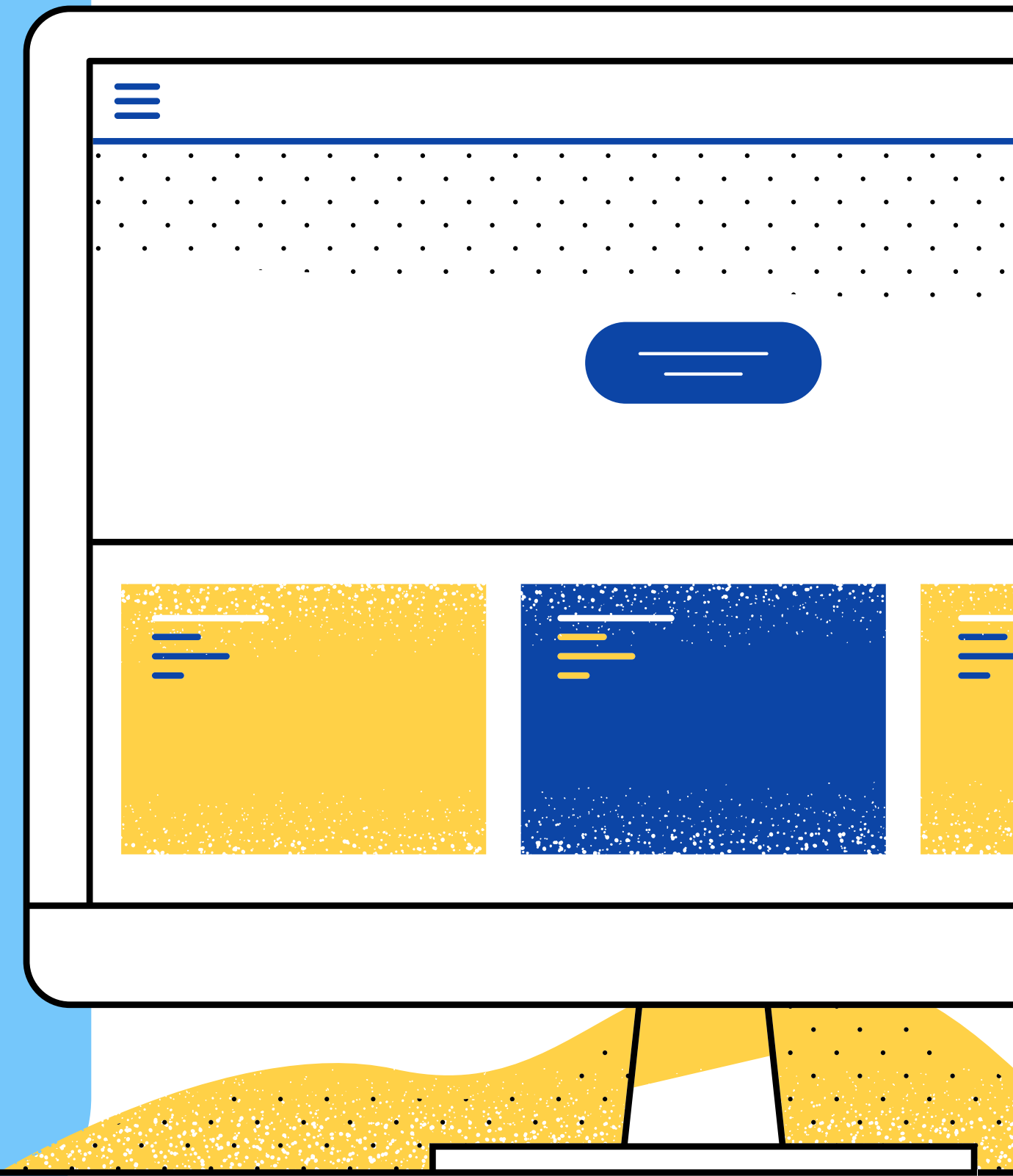
Employability is a top priority for international students and in order to remain attractive to them, universities must supplement academics with experiential learning such as co-op and internship opportunities.

Whether a foreign student intends to return to their home country in the long term, or plans to build a career in the United States, landing an internship at an American company during their course of study is very important to them.

International students who are satisfied with their US institution are much more likely to recommend it to peers, which indicates that international student recruitment and the student experience on campus are intertwined, notes a World Education Services report. The survey also found that **73%** of international students thought it was very important to choose a US university based on its ability to help them get US work experience before returning home or going elsewhere.

International students believe that being able to return to their home country with some **US work experience on their resume** significantly places them ahead of the competition in their local economies, especially when competing for jobs at large multinational companies. In fact, international students that get a US degree but return home with no work experience at all are often mocked for paying a fortune in US dollars and then failing to get a job.

Since many international students also have to pay off exorbitant student loans, a feat that is close to impossible on a salary paid in their local currency, they work hard to land a job in the United States and stick with it, at least until they are able to return home **debt free**.

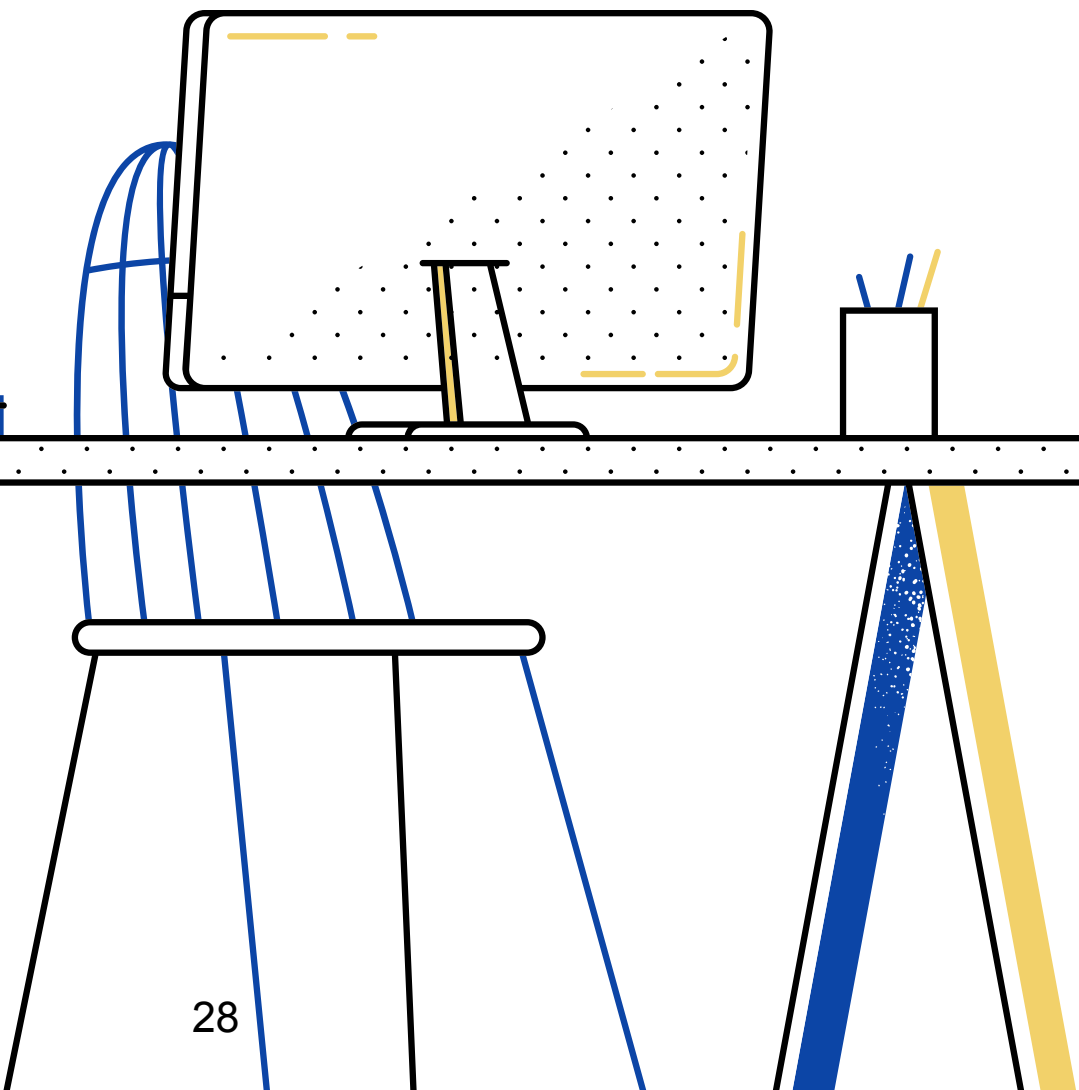


It is daunting for international students to secure internships on their own. They face cultural barriers, have to navigate challenges with their visas, lack the social capital that domestic students have through their family networks and often struggle with language skills that are not necessarily at par with American-born students, even when their overall academic performance supersedes that of their peers.

Many students have no choice but to rely heavily on the career centers at their universities, even though they don't always receive the support they need on this front.

Jenny Lee, professor of educational policy studies at the University of Arizona, notes that while international students remain important to universities in the United States, colleges don't invest a lot in supporting them beyond academics.

“Unfortunately career services at American universities cater largely to domestic students,” she said, adding that this could be one area for investment going forward, as foreign students become increasingly hesitant about attending college in the United States.



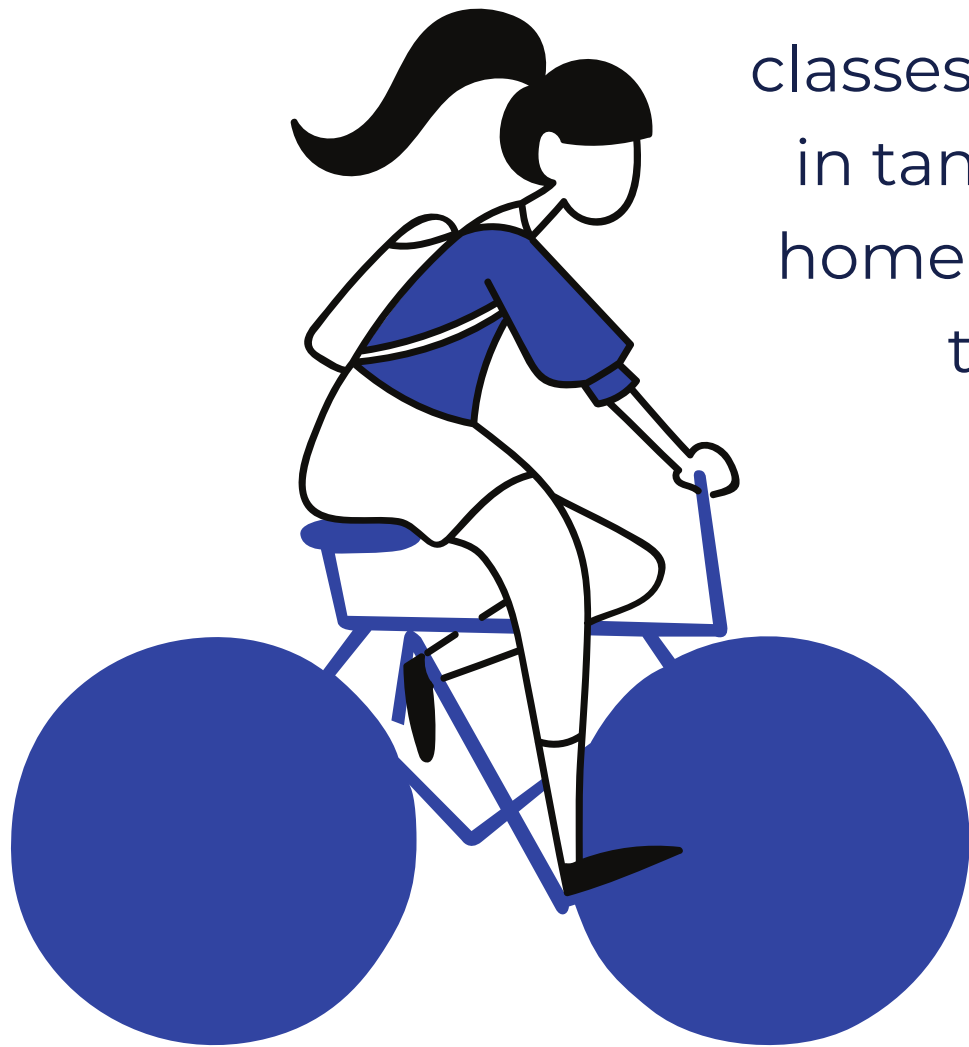
One highly effective way for universities to show support for their international student population is to incorporate at least one guaranteed experiential learning opportunity into the programs they offer, so that students know from the start that they will be able to get some industry experience that they can later leverage in their careers.



Often, American firms pay more attention to international students that already have some US work experience on their resumes, so students that benefit from an industry partnership through their university automatically become better candidates for future internships and jobs, and end up boosting employment statistics for their colleges.

Further, as COVID has delayed many enrolled international students from starting classes on campus this September, a virtual experiential learning partnership developed in tandem with US employers could go a long way in appeasing students stuck in their home countries, who are faced with forgoing in-person internships in the United States this year. This way, they still have the chance to work on real projects for American companies, even though they are unable to travel to the United States.

Working with industry leaders and ed-tech companies to run remote internship programs for international students at this time could build university brand recognition and a strong reputation for supporting students, even in exceptionally difficult circumstances.

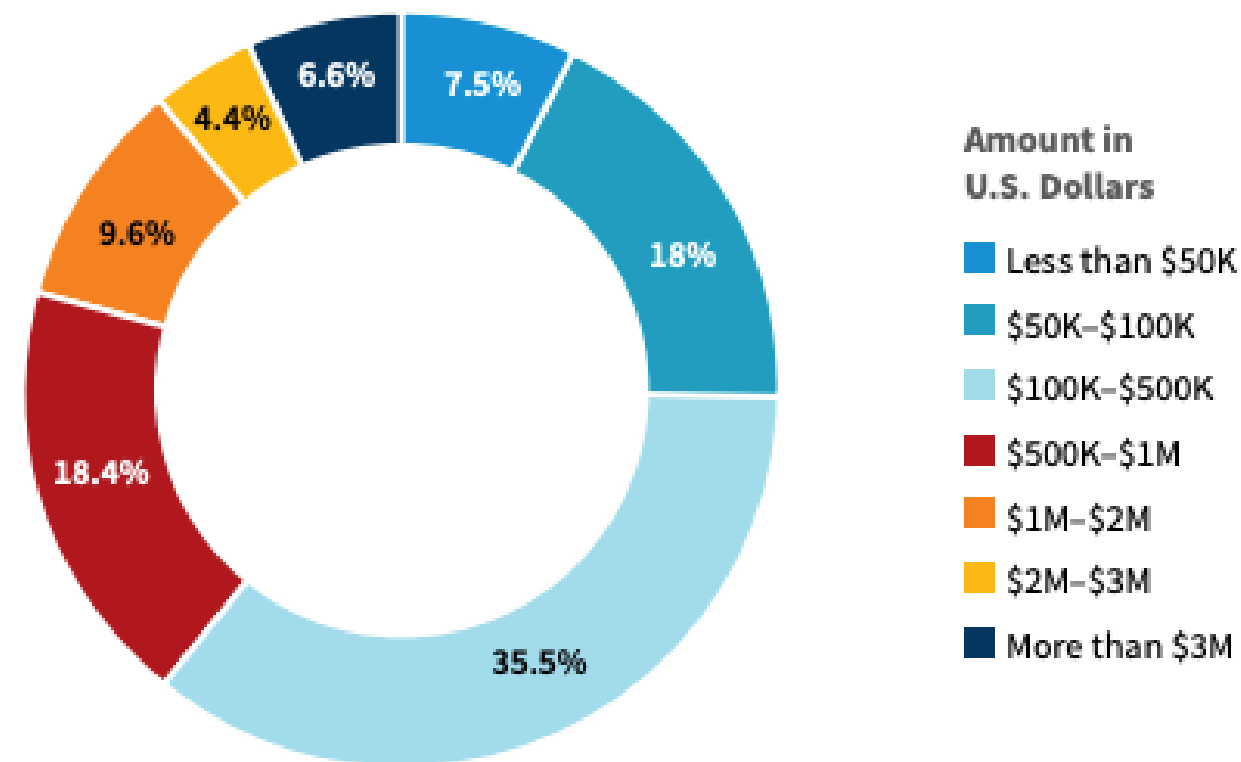


What do the numbers look like?

While a report by UK-based BridgeU, which surveyed over 850 international students in 83 countries, indicates that most international students (67%) indicate they are not changing their plans for 2020, this does not mean the US will emerge unscathed.

A recent survey by NAFSA in the United States projects a loss of \$3 billion due to a decline in international student enrolments at US universities and colleges.

In projecting a decline in international student enrollments in fall 2020, what will be the estimated financial impact or loss to your institution/organization? (n=228)

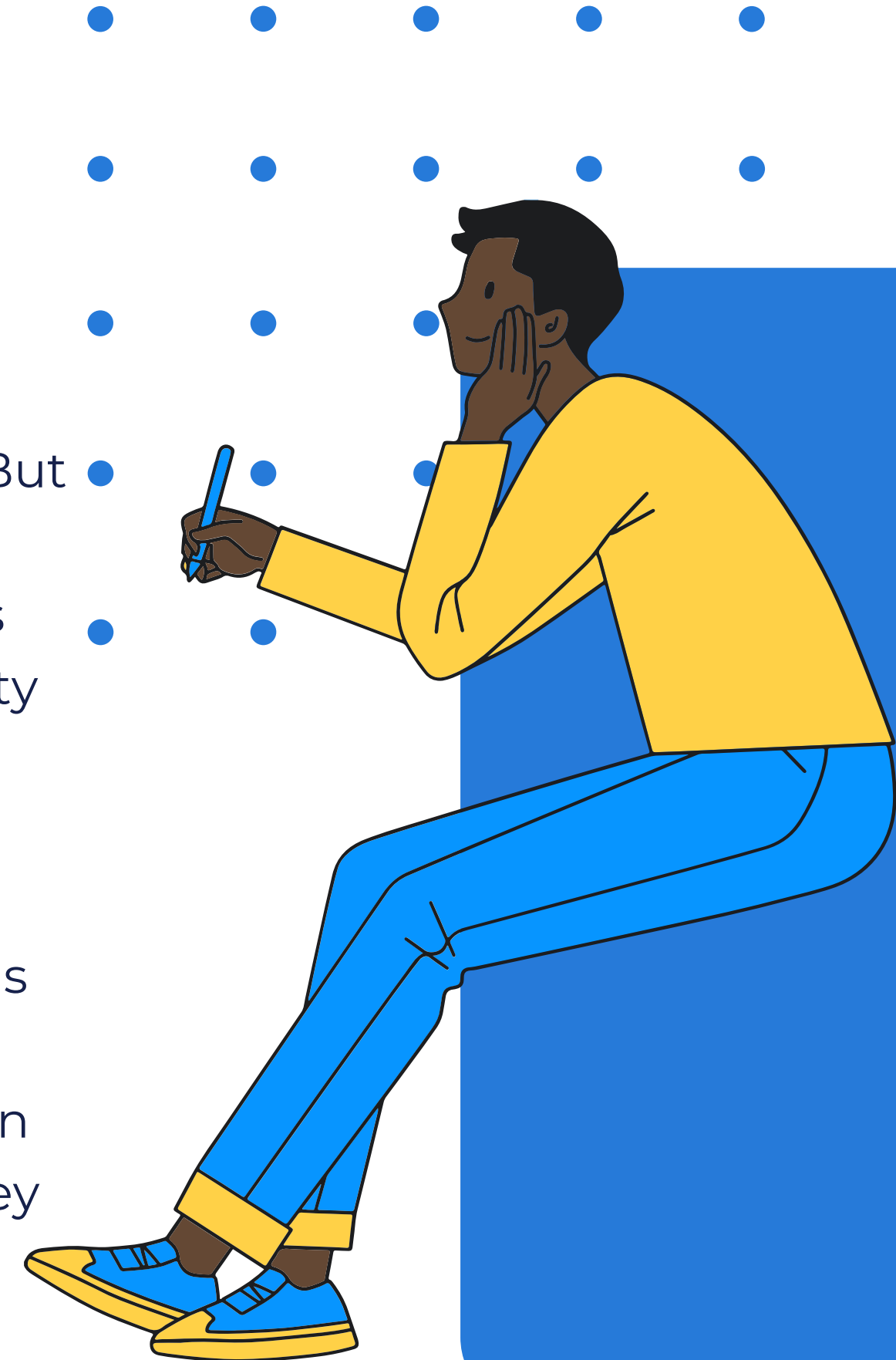


Source: NAFSA Financial Impact Survey

But the long term repercussions of a fall in international student enrollment will be felt beyond financial losses

“Typically, when the media talks about international students in the United States, it talks about the monetary value they bring. But our research shows that on average, international students actually have higher SAT scores than domestic students and this means they contribute to a college’s measure of academic quality and overall ranking,” says Mingyu Chen, a postdoctoral research associate at Princeton University.

“In the current climate, it’s important for schools to recognize this value and reflect it in their messaging. International students make huge investments when they enroll in US colleges, so given all the recent uncertainty, it is more important than ever that they feel supported and welcome.”



School away from school: how are colleges supporting international students through and beyond the crisis?

US colleges have already started to invest in innovative ways to support international students.

Pittsburgh-based education specialist WholeRen has decided to open “student villages” in several Chinese cities in a bid to help institutions across the US retain students who have already enrolled.

In an interview with [Pie News](#), the organization’s chief learning officer, Andrew Chen, explained that the plan is to host students in the “village” until they can return to the United States for their spring semester, as students in China are more liable to have issues with synchronous study options and internet access.

“Compared to the exchange semester option, or staying-at-home option, this option gives the schools much more control, enhanced learning results, and better financial outcome due to retention,” he explained. “The students and parents will also prefer more school-led interactions.”

Jenny Lee, professor of educational policy studies at the University of Arizona, also cited **'transnational education'** initiatives, through which US colleges form partnerships with foreign universities, as an increasingly popular way to attract international students, particularly in the wake of the pandemic.

"Beyond messaging, US colleges are offering more flexibility through online courses. At the University of Arizona, we have partner universities abroad, so students from those countries can go to a local university in their home country and then transfer their credits towards a University of Arizona degree. I see greater investments in initiatives of this sort in future," she said.

Meanwhile, educators remain hopeful that the rise in deferred admission requests is temporary.

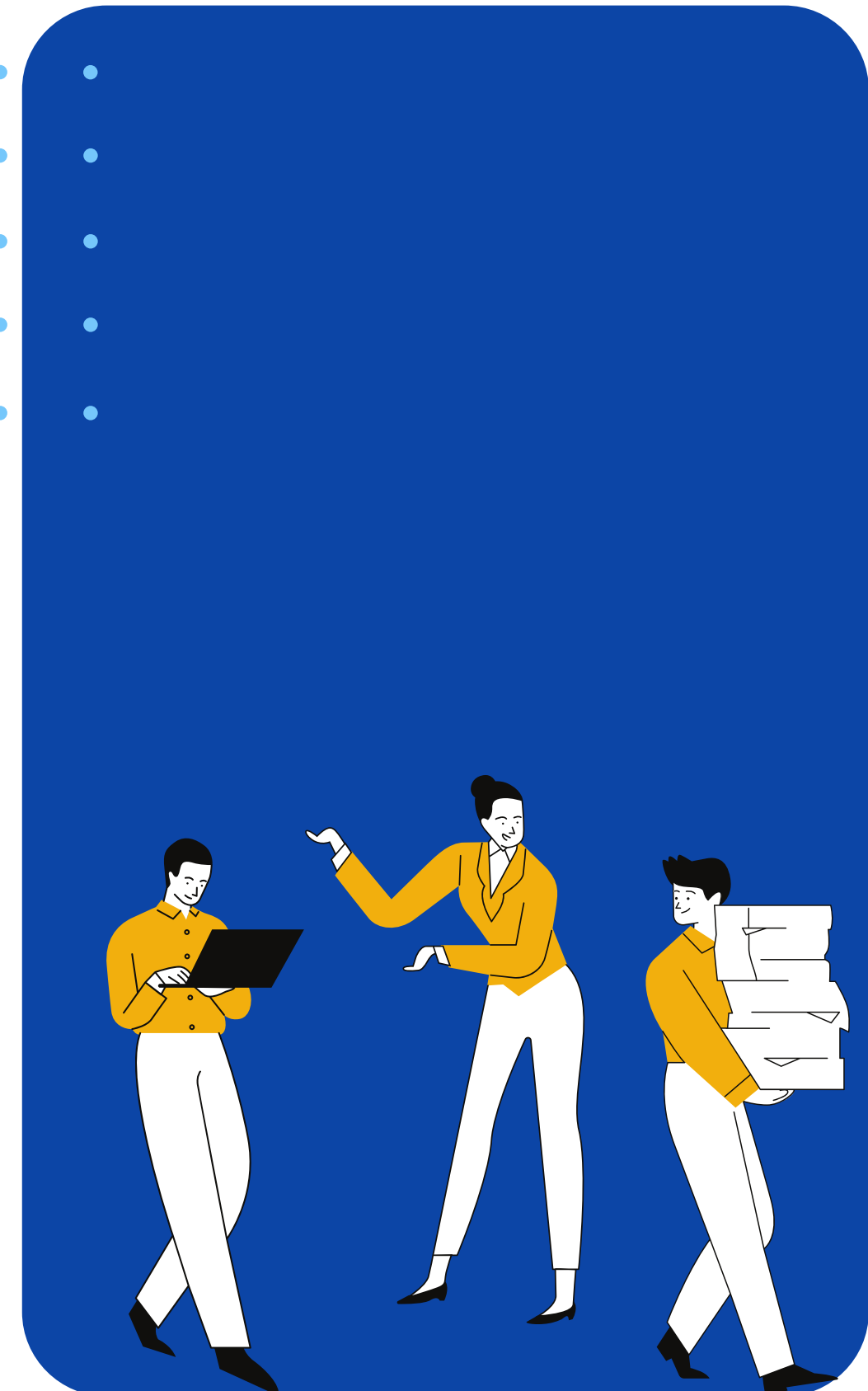
In an article earlier this year, Times Higher Education cited an EY report that estimates only about 330,000 foreigners are studying in the world's top five destination countries this year, down from 1.09 million in 2019. However the report, which analyzes findings from surveys of over 40,000 prospective international students, notes that **2021 will see up to 1.85 million people starting degrees in foreign countries, as those who deferred this year resume their studies.**

What concerns do international students have about studying in the United States this fall?

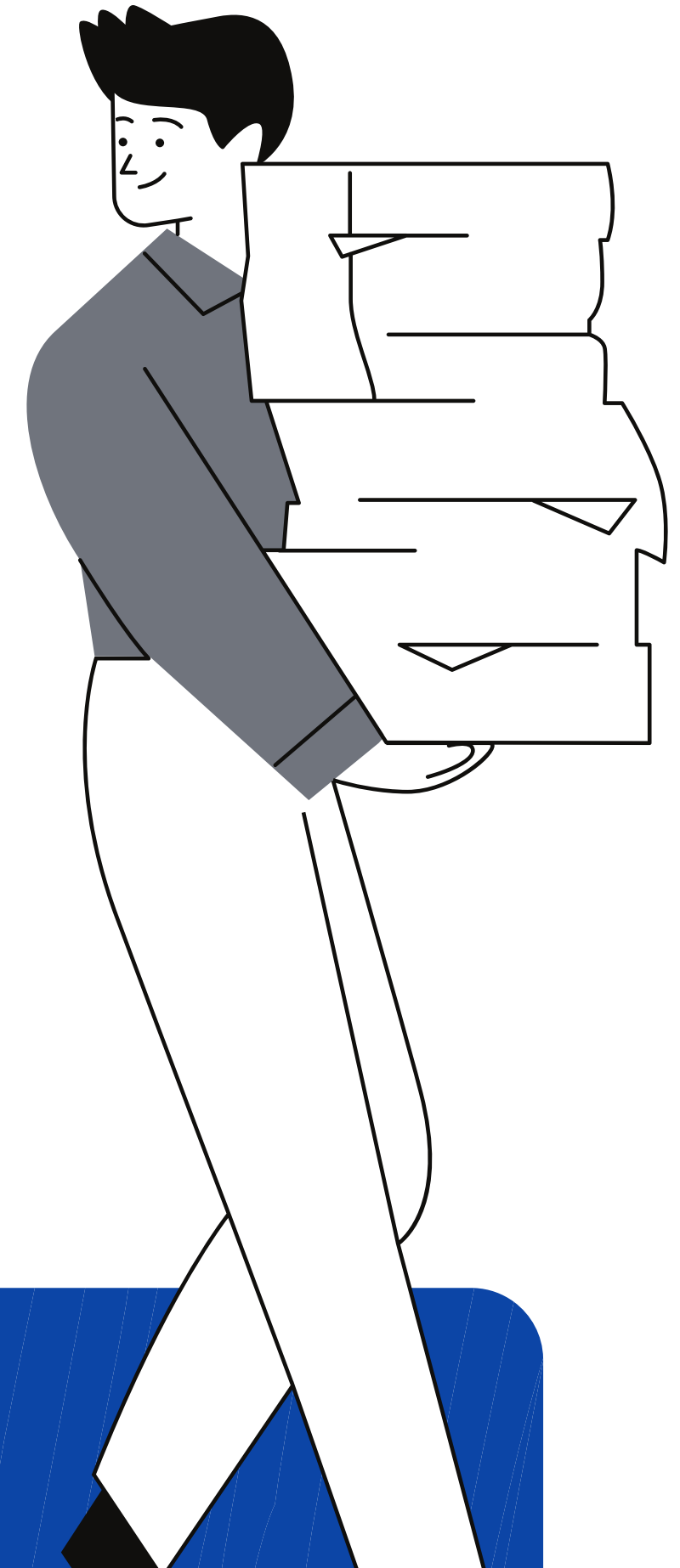
Anisha Mascarenhas, who works at a tech company in India, was due to begin graduate school in North Carolina this fall. However, when she read the university's plan for online classes for her computer science degree on the college website, it didn't inspire confidence. She decided to defer her admit by a year.

"I just don't want to be part of that guinea pig batch that gets experimented on!" she said.

"One of the biggest reasons I wanted to study in the United States was to get to experience life on campus with other students. Now I don't even know if I'll get regular opportunities that students usually have - will there still be TA and RA jobs that I can apply for?"



Class of COVID High Schoolers and The “Forced” Gap Year



One in ten US high school seniors who were planning to attend a four-yr college prior to the pandemic have made alternative plans.

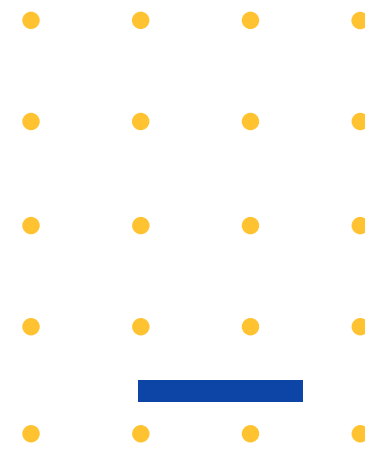


Source: Simpson Scarborough

In normal economic times, just 1% to 3% of high school seniors take a year off before enrolling in college. But today, more students in the high school Class of 2020 may be considering delayed enrollment due to concerns about health, financial constraints, or online instruction.

One in ten US high school seniors who were planning to attend a four-year college or university prior to the pandemic have already made alternative plans, according to research firm Simpson Scarborough, which recommends that higher education should plan for a 10% decline in first-time, full-time enrollment.

The vast majority of students who are re-evaluating their decision to attend college this fall blame COVID-19 for ruining their plans to attend a 4-year residential institution. Nearly half plan to attend a community college and about a third plan to enroll in an online college. The remainder may not go to college at all, the report says.



Joe O'Shea, Dean of Undergraduate Studies at Florida State University and author of the book *Gap Year: How Delaying College Changes People in Ways the World Needs*, notes that students taking gap years this year are looking for virtual experiences that will help them network and immerse themselves in service, internships and other forms of experiential education.

“If a student is simply trying to take time off—without a clear plan for the year—because they are uncertain about having some or all of their college classes online, I would caution them to think about the decision,” he said.

“Given the changing nature of the pandemic, it’s very possible that gap year plans, such as travel, internships, or service opportunities are upended...

The need for students to be purposeful, deliberate and manage risks in their gap year planning is especially heightened this year.”



O'Shea notes that organizations which specialize in gap year education are particularly well positioned to provide students with structure by setting learning goals, encouraging guided reflection and giving them support throughout.

Scott O'Neill, interim director of Marketing Undergraduate and Recruitment at the University of Waterloo in Canada, recommends that students mulling a gap year due to COVID19 purposefully pursue experiences that are relatable in some way to their intended field of study.

“Given that the majority of our admissions are to co-op programs, employability looms large in admissions decisions. For students choosing to take a gap year with plans to apply for Fall 2021, an externship would be one way to productively invest time and effort during that year,” he said.

“It is just as important to figure out what you don’t want to do, in addition to getting experience doing the kind of work you do want to do.”

Attending university has grown more competitive and expensive over the years. As employers increasingly place premiums on candidates who are able to demonstrate work or research experience that directly correlates to the job on offer, students are now considering alternatives to a fully fledged college degree and opting instead for “**micro**” **degrees and online courses** to demonstrate their academic aptitude. These digital certification qualifications help individuals demonstrate proficiency in a particular industry area or skill and tend to be short, low-cost online courses.

It stands to reason that micro-credentials become more popular as COVID19 hurts the economy because many students can no longer afford to attend college merely because it is the natural next step in their academic career.

With the advent of remote internships, Gen Z high schoolers have the ability to differentiate themselves by gaining corporate work experience to boost their college applications. And the COVID19 pandemic has just opened up a wealth of work-from-home options for under 18's.



Why High School is the Perfect Time to Introduce Students to Experiential Learning





Although COVID19 has made this year extremely challenging for high schools, the crisis has also shone a spotlight on the cracks in our education system and sparked more conversations about the best ways to impart teenagers with the knowledge and skills they need to transition to and beyond college.

A few forward-thinking educators are looking to address some of the drawbacks of a traditional American education right at the high school level, by being flexible about how students can demonstrate competency to graduate.

“As we see it, the credit system is an accounting system, not a learning system,” explains David Ruff, a founding member and director of the New England Secondary School Consortium.

“At the high school level, many schools count internships and externships as extra credit. We’re working to make those things count as actual credit and with COVID, we’ve really been doubling down on that strategy.”





Ruff explains that personalizing education pathways to allow students to pursue learning opportunities that appeal to them is very much the future of education. For example, whether a student elects to do an internship and showcase a portfolio of work, or chooses to spend extra time on algebra classes, they will be allowed to graduate as long as they are able to demonstrate they have built skills that meet grading criteria.

The shift to competency-based learning

By recognizing the value of experiential learning, educators acknowledge that the onus of helping students build career-ready skills falls to professors, rather than managers at their first jobs. This is the first step towards a broader adoption of experiences that provide real-world training, from co-ops to field trips and remote externships in favor of classroom-focused education.

“There are historical factors that play into the traditional practice of de-emphasizing career preparedness in high schools,” says Sade Bonilla, assistant professor in the college of education at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

“In the past, vocational education would typically target students from underserved backgrounds who couldn’t afford college, so many schools shifted focus to provide college preparation services over career preparation services.”

However, Bonilla notes that career pathway initiatives, particularly in states like California and Tennessee, have gained popularity over the past few years. Through programs supported by the state, students are encouraged to take multiple thematic courses and spend time at local businesses to meet the requirements of a capstone project in high school.

“For example, a student might take courses in anatomy and physiology and get a certified nursing assistant certificate and they might also get to work at a local hospice to build up practical skills,” she explained.

“However, efforts of this sort do have to be integrated into the regular schooling experience for them to become mainstream.”

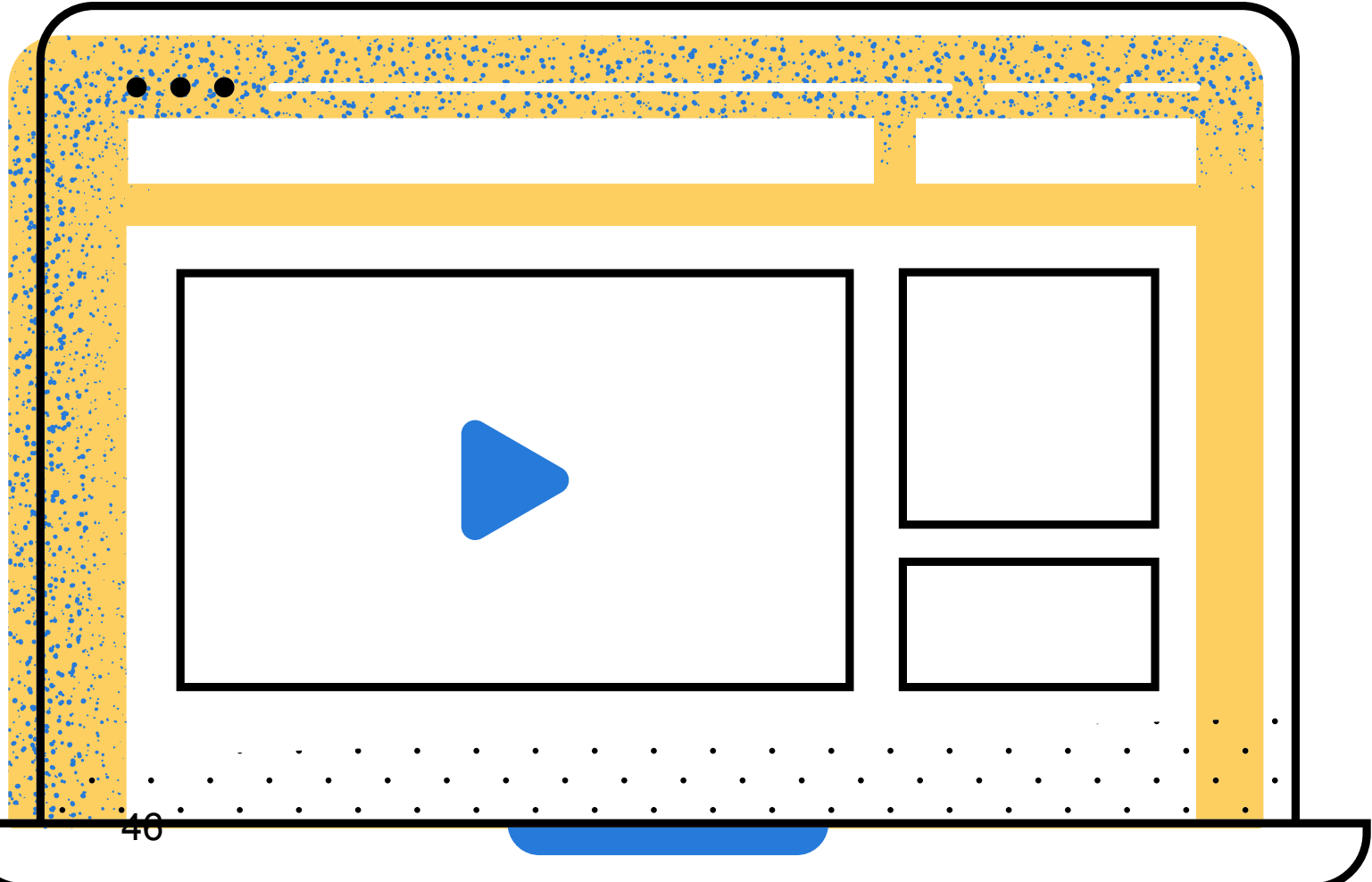
On the other side of the world, Dulwich College International, a group of leading international colleges and high schools in Asia, actually saw the disruption caused by the COVID19 lockdown as a chance to give students their first taste of corporate life via remote externships.

“COVID-19 may have impacted the learning experience of students around the world, but at Dulwich, we see an opportunity to think out of the box to continue to deliver holistic and experiential learning,” said Sian May, the group’s Director of Senior School.

Through a series of initiatives targeted at their Year 11 and Year 13 (10th and 12th grade) students, Dulwich College International rolled out a comprehensive program to provide a variety of real-world experiences that would allow students to apply skills beyond the classroom, including remote externships through a partnership with Paragon One.

While the challenges of remote work and social distancing have triggered considerable innovation in higher education and consequently career preparedness efforts, some experts warn that COVID19 could also widen the opportunity gap for students from underserved communities, because it has laid bare the digital divide that exists, even in developed nations like the United States."

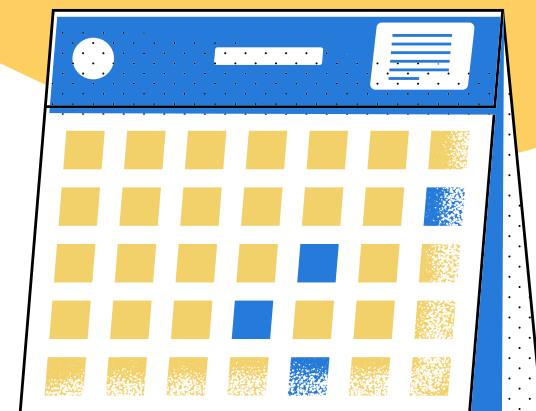
A lot of young people don't have internet access and broadband and I was unpleasantly surprised to learn that this is not just a problem in rural areas. Students living in urban centers are less likely to have broadband in their homes, and during the pandemic, not having access to public wifi has been problematic," said Dr. Stephanie McGencey, Executive Director at the American Youth Policy Forum.



"Digital equity is more than schools distributing laptops to students. In all likelihood, if a student needs to be given a device, then the likelihood of them or someone they live with knowing how to connect it to the internet, create profiles and log into and navigate e-learning platforms to complete assignments is very low."

McGencey highlights an important reason why **more non-profits that work with teens from low-income families should be investing in experiential learning programs** that give them the chance to gain real work experience, particularly those that help them build digital skills that are now integral to every modern career.

While the pandemic has put many educator-employer partnerships on hold, schools and non-profits can still leverage virtual career mentorship programs to recommend remote internship opportunities for teenagers in their final years of high school. A remote internship at this stage of one's academic career can help high schoolers get a taste of what it is like to pursue a career in a particular industry and even prevent them making expensive mistakes by choosing majors that they later feel disillusioned by in college.



High schoolers with exposure to experiential learning are also at an advantage when applying to college and securing internships during their time at university.

Melissa Zak, an undergraduate admissions officer at the University of Nottingham in the UK, says that high school graduates who list remote work experience on their resumes when applying to college are generally regarded to possess skills like independent learning and self-motivation.

“In terms of future applicants, those who can show they have the capacity for independent study, through activities such as remote externships, will be viewed positively,” she said.

“These skills not only help to develop an applicant’s profile for university, but will highlight to future employers the applicant’s adaptability to changing circumstances.”



Are Colleges Really Preparing Students for the Workforce?




John Farrar, industry leader for education at Google, believes the core model for higher education “is being blown up as we speak.”

“The longer the pandemic inhibits, the more comfortable we will get with virtual learning and people will look at it from a return on investment perspective. In a few months, we have pulled virtual learning forward to a place it would have taken us close to a decade to reach,” he said.





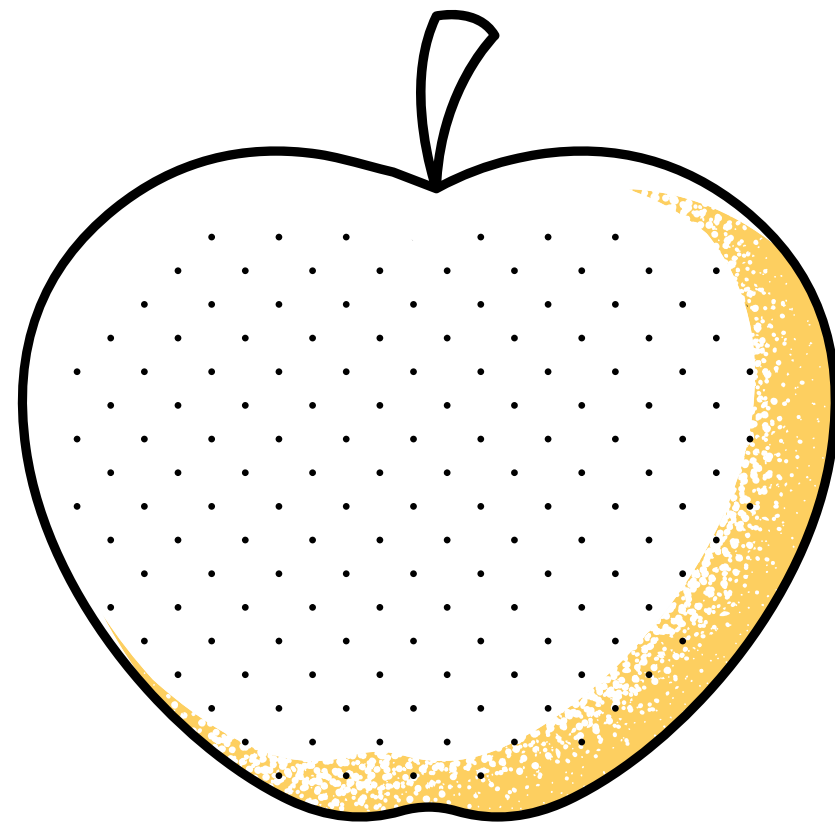
“We’re already seeing that the future of education is going to be a student-driven experience, rather than a university-driven one.”



With students placing more importance on career outcomes as a result of their education, programs that allow them to directly apply classroom learning in the field and leverage experiential learning as work experience on their resumes will grow more relevant.

Just before the pandemic, consulting firm BCG collaborated with Google to survey 166 US business executives and interview 18 higher-education professionals to understand how educators and employers could synchronize their efforts to ready students for corporate life.

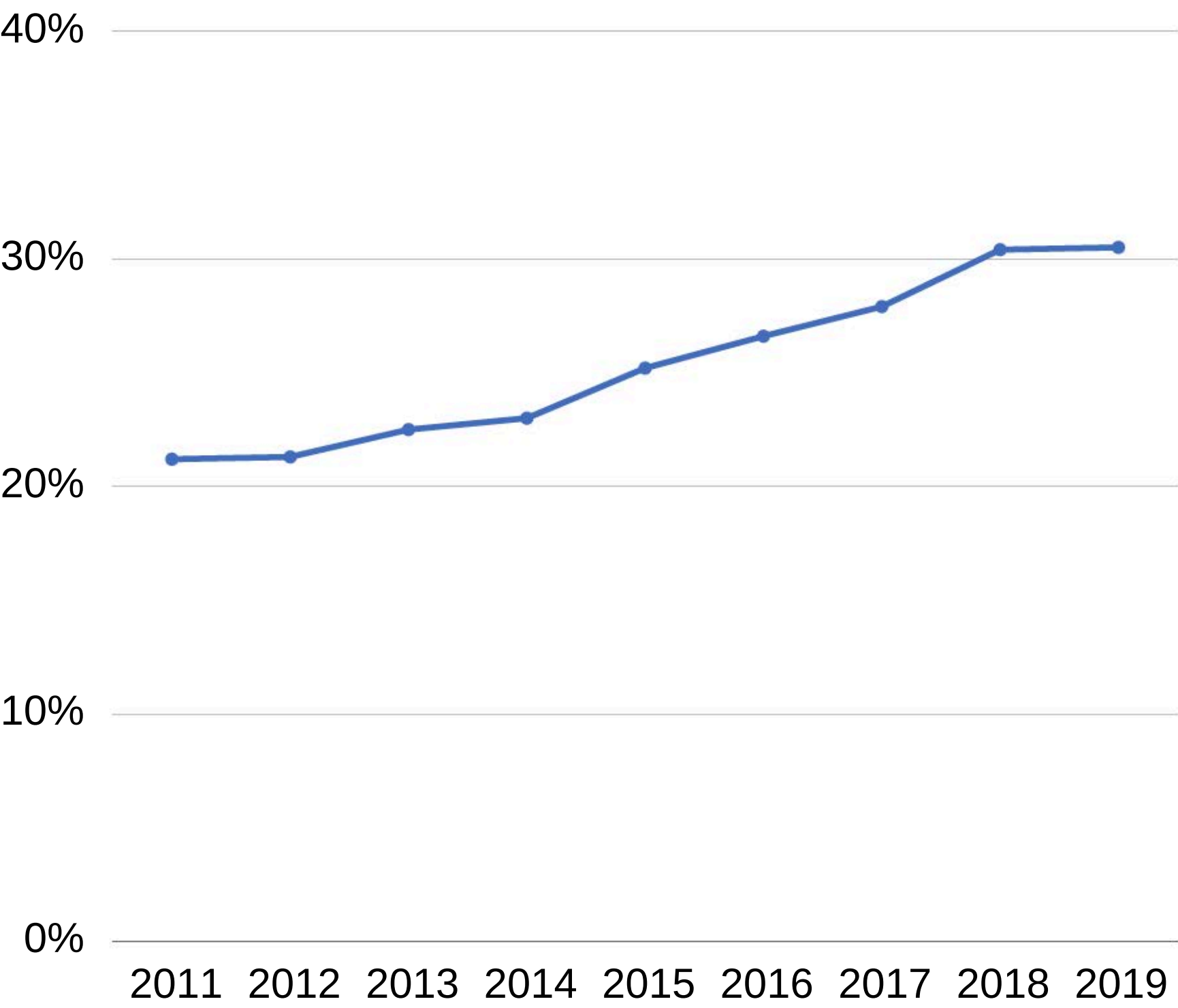
An earlier report found a huge skills mismatch in the global workforce that is responsible for a sizable loss in labor productivity; researchers estimated that 1.3 billion people around the world have competencies misaligned with the work they perform, including 53.3 million in the US.



“Preskilling—providing employees with the skills they require before they begin their career—is exactly what higher-ed institutions were created to do. Yet only 36% of the business leaders we surveyed believe these institutions give their graduates adequate training,” the authors write.

“Although higher education typically provides a good foundation and mindset for pursuing a future career, it can fall short in providing an up-to-date education that aligns with employers’ needs.”

USE OF EMPLOYER PARTNERSHIPS OVER TIME, 2011-19



This is clearly illustrated by the fact that the number of career centers at US colleges that have some sort of partnership with employers is dismally low.

NACE data shows that in 2019, just 30.5% of career centers had industry partnerships, most of which were restricted to large schools and those with a special academic focus.

Although that number has grown steadily from 21.2% in 2011, researchers note that the 2019-2020 academic year was the first one since the recovery following the Great Depression where there was no significant change from the previous year, which could indicate that the higher education ecosystem is nearing a ceiling on partnerships with industry.

This is particularly worrying, because if the crisis should have taught us anything, it is that colleges need to be boosting budgets at career centers and enforcing mandates to pursue partnerships with industry that could lead to positive career outcomes for students.



On the other side of the Atlantic, UK universities are striking increasingly innovative partnerships with employers to refine the education programs they offer, leveraging the British government's apprenticeship levy to cover costs of employing students full time and simultaneously delivering a competitive degree.

A recent example of such an experiential learning partnership is a new apprenticeship program announced between Northeastern University's UK campus and tech company ServiceNow.

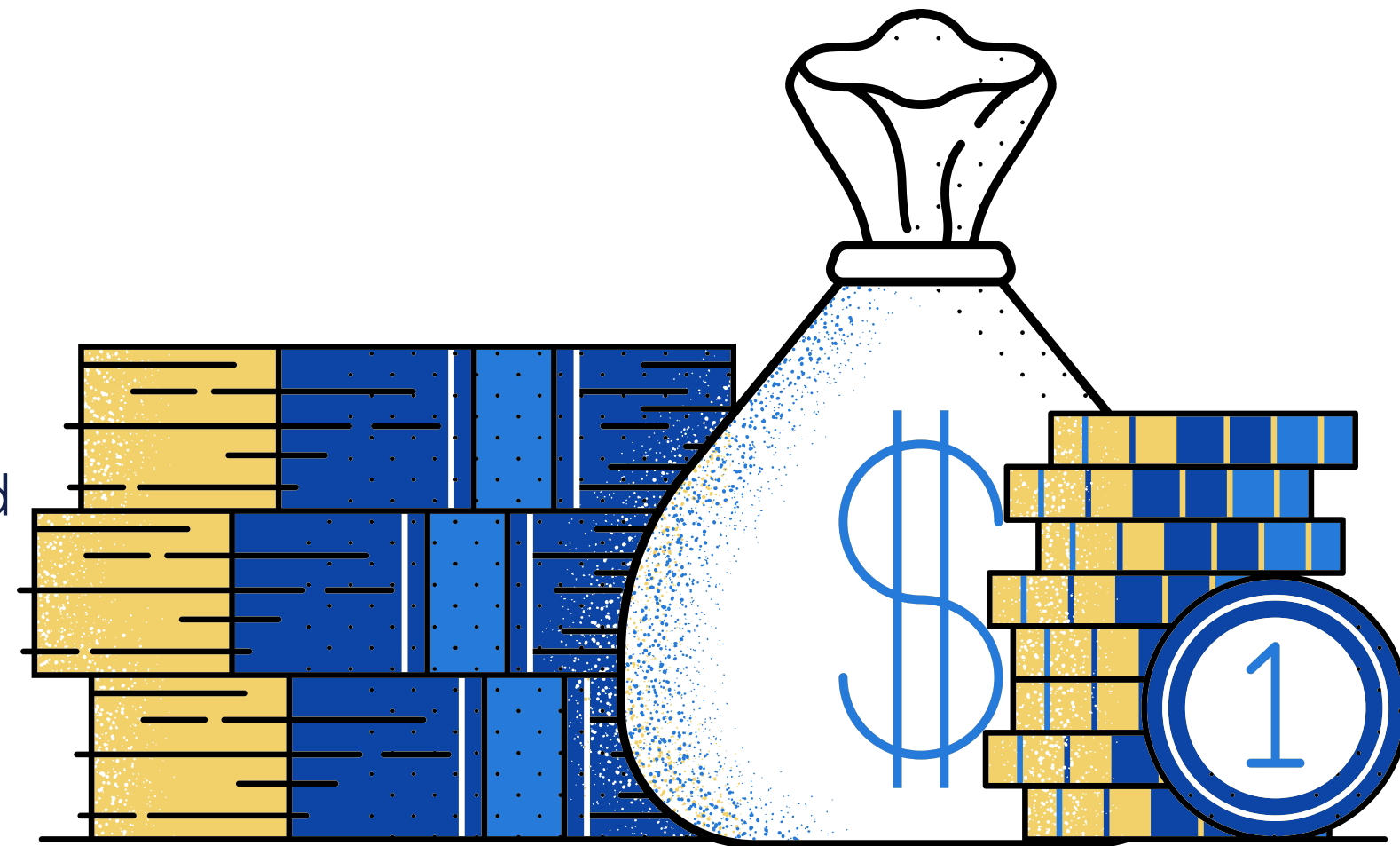
Starting in October this year, students will be working in roles within organizations that require ServiceNow skills and will spend 80% of their time gaining on-the-job experience and 20% dedicated learning time to achieve their degree.

“Every company is looking for untapped recruiting options and ways to strengthen career development for their employees. An opportunity to get real workplace experience, develop in-demand ServiceNow skills, and work toward a university degree is a perfect combination for someone starting or re-starting their career, and for the companies that are looking to hire them,” Cat Lang, Senior Vice President of Global Education for ServiceNow said in a [statement](#).

As Lang highlights, a key feature of a successful experiential learning partnership is offering value to both students and employers, who are looking for creative ways to assess and engage new talent for their pipelines.

Christina Jaracz, Northeastern's Assistant Vice President of Corporate Partnerships, says education that is supplemented with experiential learning and career-building opportunities is a hallmark of the university's offering.

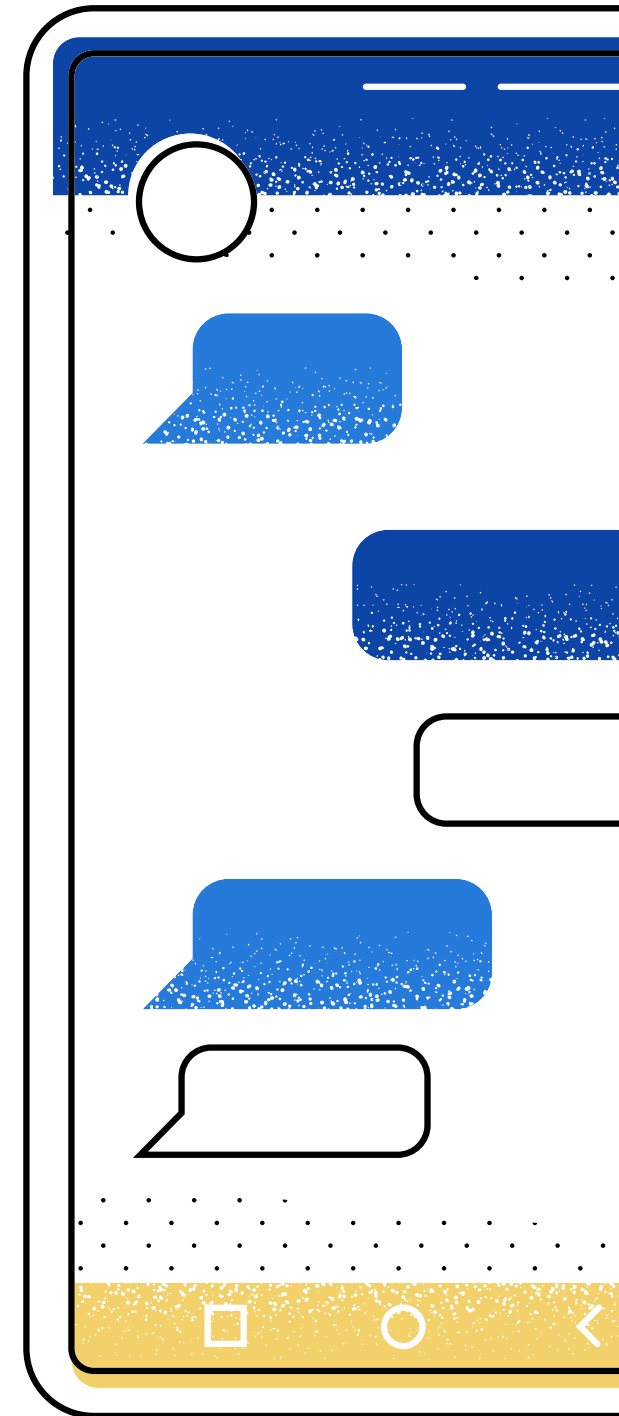
"Employers want talent that is well-suited for their own organization, so we work with them to create a program that serves as an accessible front door for talent," she said.



“There are many high-quality jobs in industries where supply isn’t meeting high demand. **We work with employers to identify their talent needs and customize a program and certification that supports it. This way our students are developing business skills with imminent, real life applications and they’re also getting experiential learning opportunities and an integrated certification.**”

Nick Petford, Vice Chancellor and CEO of the University of Northampton in the UK highlights how his university is exploring partnerships with manufacturing firms in places like Mexico and Afghanistan to help them “upskill” employees through training programs and by delivering micro credentials.

In exchange, these firms then offer Northampton students the chance to work on real projects through internships. The university is also creative in networking through the sponsorships it bestows, such as its funding of a local football team that has opened up internship opportunities for students interested in careers in the sports industry.





“COVID has absolutely accelerated the need for education institutions to partner up and bring employment opportunities to students,” Petford said.

“Since universities do struggle to innovate when it comes to connecting with a good network of employers that will do that, working with a startup or career accelerator that can act as a middleman with industry is much easier.”



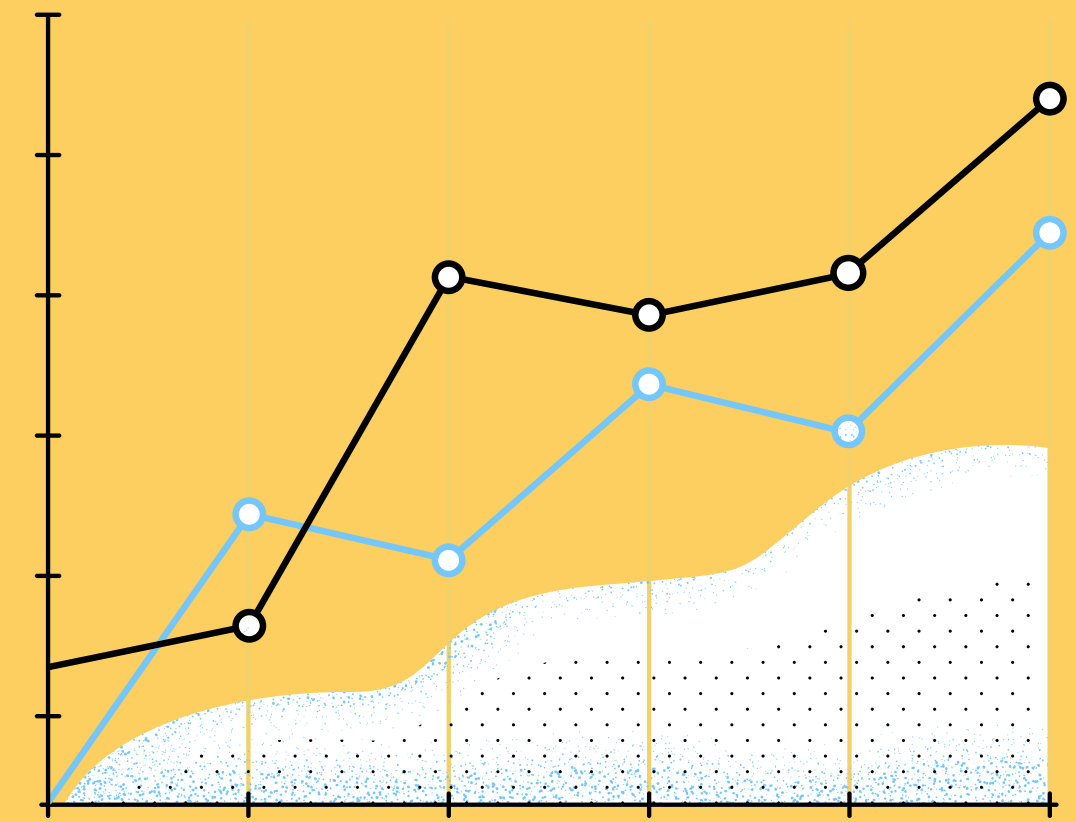
Campus Recruiting in a Remote Work World

Last year, employers attended 48 career fairs on average and nearly half of all full time college hires resulted from interviews conducted on campus.

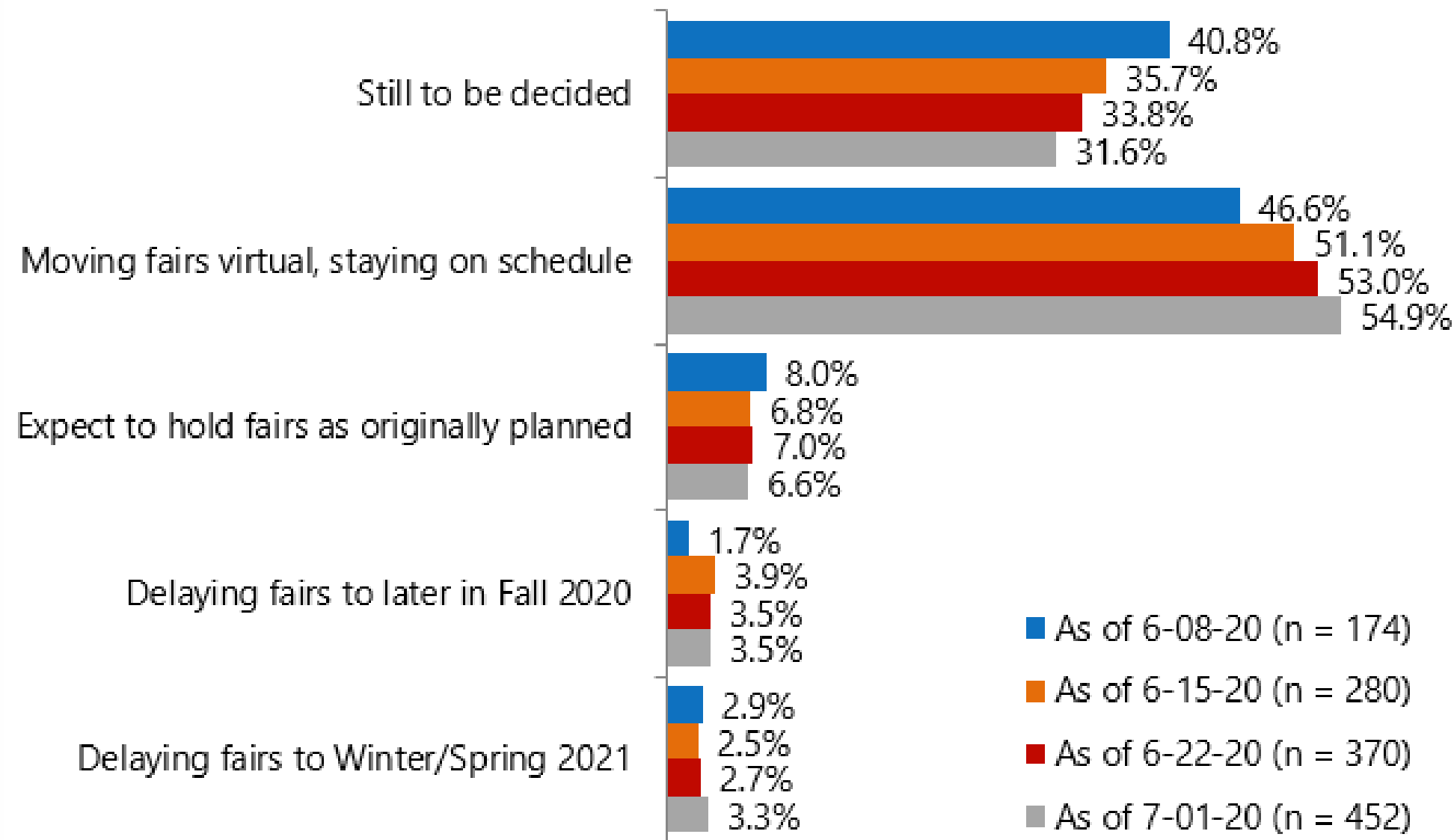
Those numbers are likely to look very different in 2020, as both career centers at colleges and campus recruiters scramble to find alternatives to hiring processes that have long been the norm.

This year has certainly placed lofty demands on HR folk, only 16% of whom report that they feel prepared to transition to fully virtual recruitment and onboarding programs.

Despite the rise in remote meetings, recruiters at smaller firms are hamstrung by budgets that don't allow for the best digital tools to manage virtual hiring and are resorting to keeping track of virtual interviews as best they can using Excel, Google Sheets and e-mail. Worse still, new employees and interns who are onboarded online struggle to feel like part of the team and the onus of engaging them often falls to the same busy HR manager.



Changes to Timing of Career Fairs for 2020-21



Source: NACE Coronavirus Quick Poll June 2020

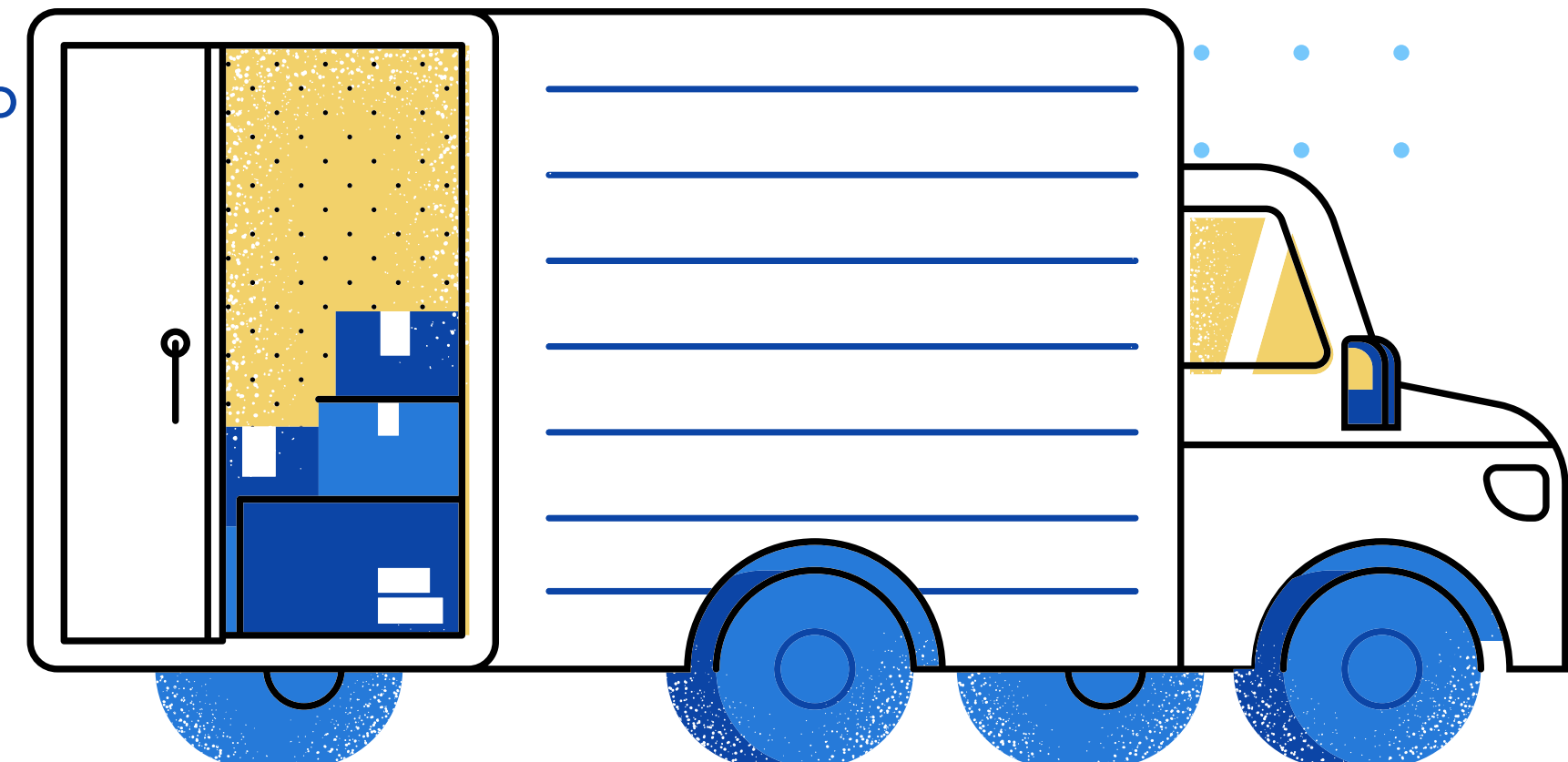
“Preliminary results of our Job Outlook survey for 2021 show that 46% of employer respondents plan to recruit 100% virtually this fall and next spring,” says Andrea Koncz, Research Manager at the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE).

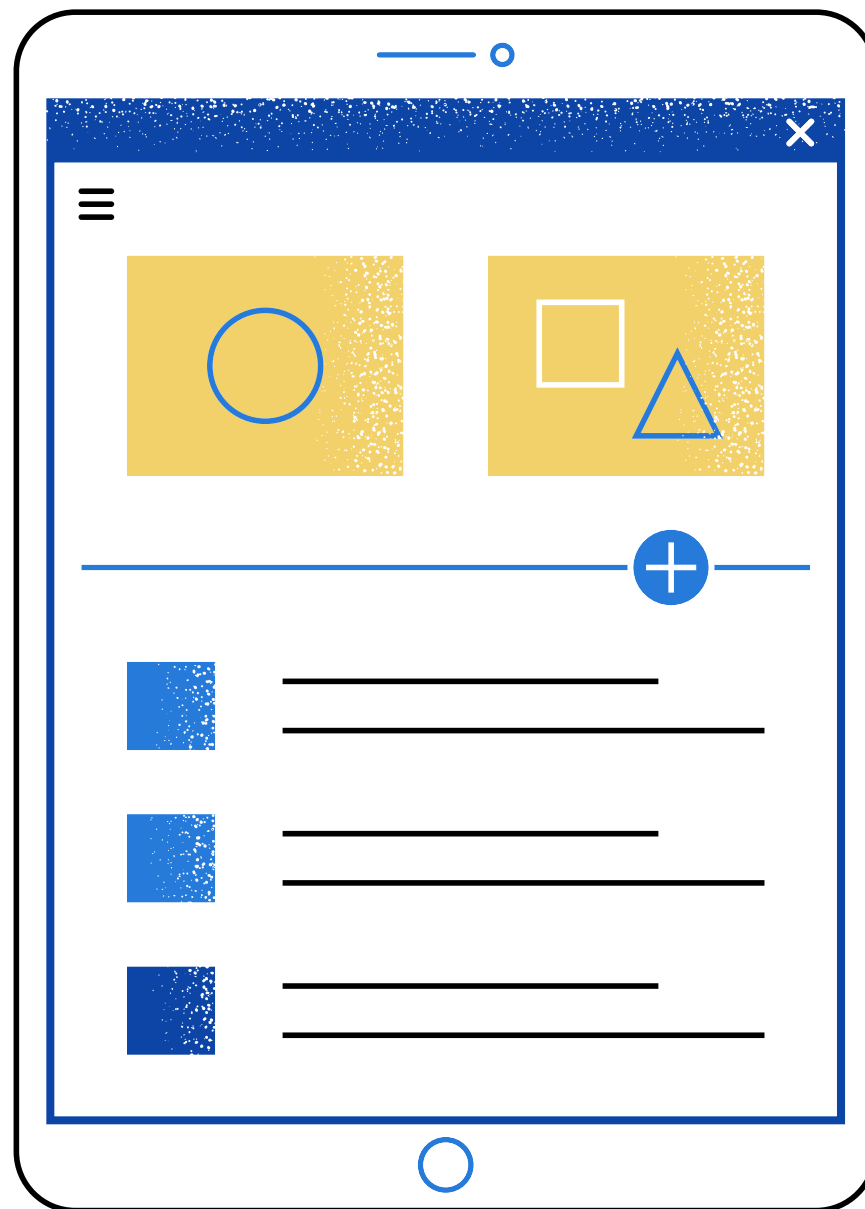
“It’s really created a lot of challenges for colleges and employers, because they don’t have that face-to-face contact at career fairs.”

Because of the impact to the economy, many employers are also still deciding whether to recruit from campus as usual.

Ryan Edmonds, Director of Employer Relations at Connecticut College said the college has moved away from traditional career fairs and is directly liaising with recruiters.

“We work with a group of high-profile employers to set-up interview days for students to apply and get pre-selected to participate in. As of today, we are seeing a sharp decline in recruiter participation, due to unknown hiring priorities at this time. It remains to be seen how recruiters will change their interview process, outside of substituting video conferencing for in-person meetings.”





How can recruiters navigate hiring and onboarding students in a remote work world?

Recognizing that COVID19 is a trigger point for massive innovation in talent acquisition is key.

Approaches that have served HR managers for years are quickly becoming redundant and solutions such as the opening up of permanently remote roles, which previously seemed unworkable, are now becoming more attractive.

Many recruiters are beginning to realize that being open to remote work in the long term stands to massively expand their talent pool. Companies are also realizing the advantages of having employees log in to work from different time zones.

When hiring students for internships and full time roles, filtering resumes to target candidates that already have remote work experience could be very beneficial to companies.

Recruiters and managers will find it far easier to work with students who already have experience being part of remote teams, because they are more likely to have built essential skills like communicating virtually, using remote work tools and engaging in work-from-home practices that boost productivity.

Further, recruiters are no longer restricted to hiring from campuses that they usually travel in person to. **We know that in 2019 nearly 99% of employers recruited from traditional four year universities.** But it has long been a practice for employers in big cities like San Francisco and New York to recruit from universities closest to their offices; this might finally be the year that puts campuses in obscure locations on par with their counterparts in the cities when it comes to attracting big employers.

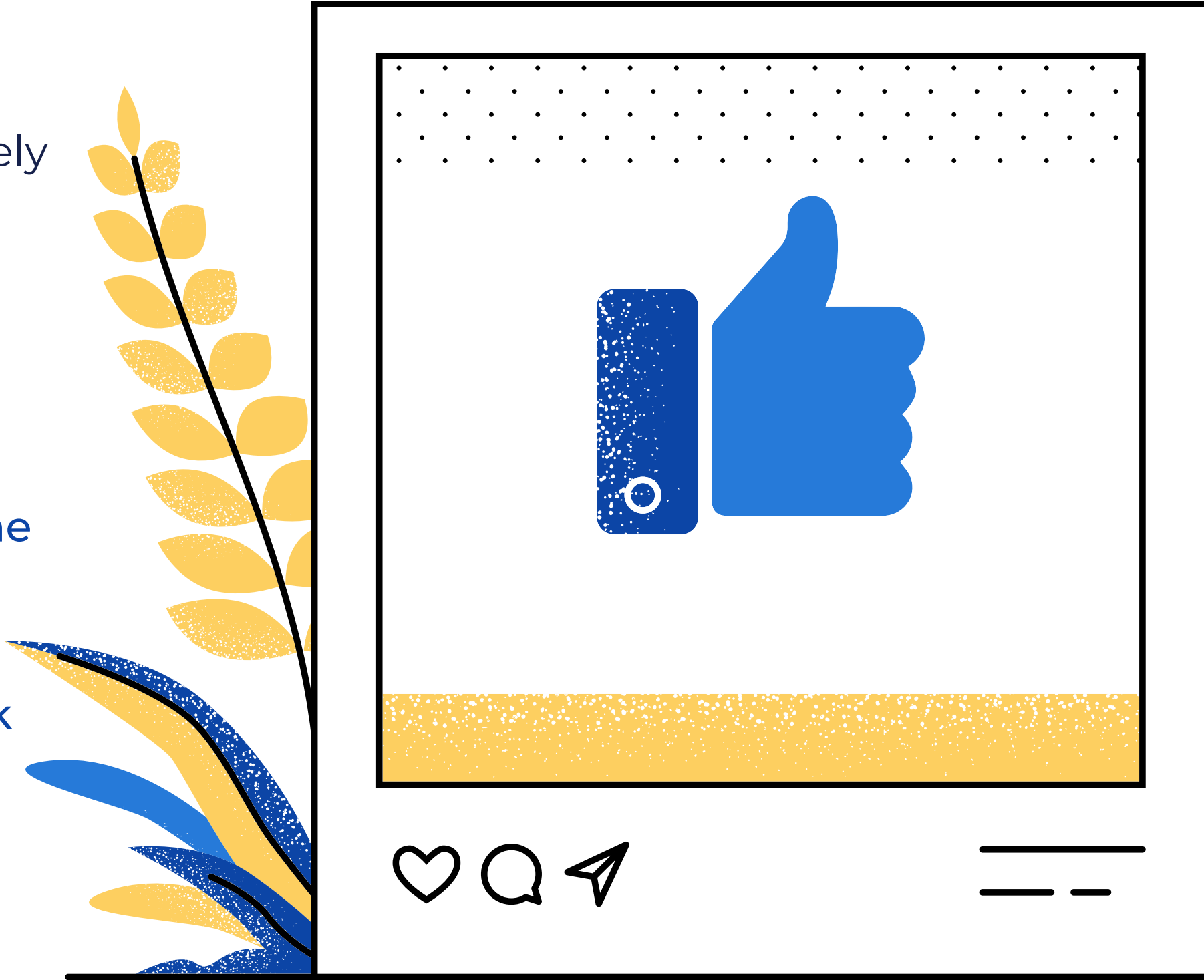
“COVID has caused companies to go from the mindset of, ‘let’s focus our hiring resources on these select schools’, to ‘let’s think bigger!’,” says Jerry Lee, COO of career coaching startup Wonsulting and former senior Strategy & Operations Manager at Google.


“COVID has caused companies to go from the mindset of, ‘let’s focus our hiring resources on these select schools’, to ‘let’s think bigger!’,” says Jerry Lee, COO of career coaching startup Wonsulting and former senior Strategy & Operations Manager at Google.

“This is a great opportunity for career centers at smaller schools to take advantage of and really prepare their students to stand out in the recruiting process.”

Susie Krueger, a recruiter from Zillow, said the company is redefining it’s interview process and switching to a completely virtual format. Aside from devoting time to online campus fairs, it is also exploring new ways to engage students, including by running a remote externship program with Paragon One to attract and assess potential candidates.

“We hire interns every year and the intern class becomes the funnel for new talent. With the Paragon One project, we’ve been able to take a hands off approach on the day-to-day management of the remote externs, but we still get to peek at the students’ work product and then funnel them into interviews before hiring season even officially starts.”





With a rise in remote internships and other virtual experiential learning experiences for students triggered by COVID19, employers are starting to realize that there are more effective ways of assessing student talent than taking up managers' time reading through a pile of resumes.

By finding better ways to engage with universities and help them understand what skills recruiters are looking for, employers can actually make sure that higher education plays a bigger role in training students to learn skills they actually need on the job.

Jerry Lee, COO of career coaching startup Wonsulting and former senior Strategy & Operations Manager at Google, believes that for experiential learning to truly work, companies have to work with schools to integrate these opportunities into their academic curriculum.

“While schools give students a foundation, companies know that it is the work experience component that helps students translate that knowledge into actionable skills that are relevant in the job force. Soft skills like how to send an email to a vice president or how to create an effective presentation can only be learned through experience.”



What does the future look like?

While it's too early to tell what remote work practices will stick long after the pandemic, it is safe to say that many aspects of recruiting will permanently change.

"I think employers have a lot more flexibility when interviewing and hiring if they aren't travelling physically to campuses, because they can meet a lot more students virtually," Koncz said.

"I don't know if they'll ever entirely shift back to going on campus and interviewing in person. It will probably end up being a combination of both virtual and campus hiring."

How Experiential Learning and Remote Work Can Accelerate Diverse and Inclusive Recruiting



As companies grow more comfortable with remote work, many will choose to revisit traditional recruiting practices, simply because remote work can be cheaper, save time and increase the size of a firm's recruiting pool.

But this also means that for the first time, many firms will look beyond Ivy League campus fairs, the conventional yardstick used to measure pedigree, and instead open up virtual interviews to students from colleges that their recruiters don't usually visit in person.

If recruiters build efficient-enough processes to bring new hires on board entirely online this season, they might cut down on campus visits even after the pandemic and devote more time to interviewing candidates from diverse backgrounds online.

This could organically accelerate the inclusivity efforts that companies have so far had to consciously integrate into their recruiting processes.



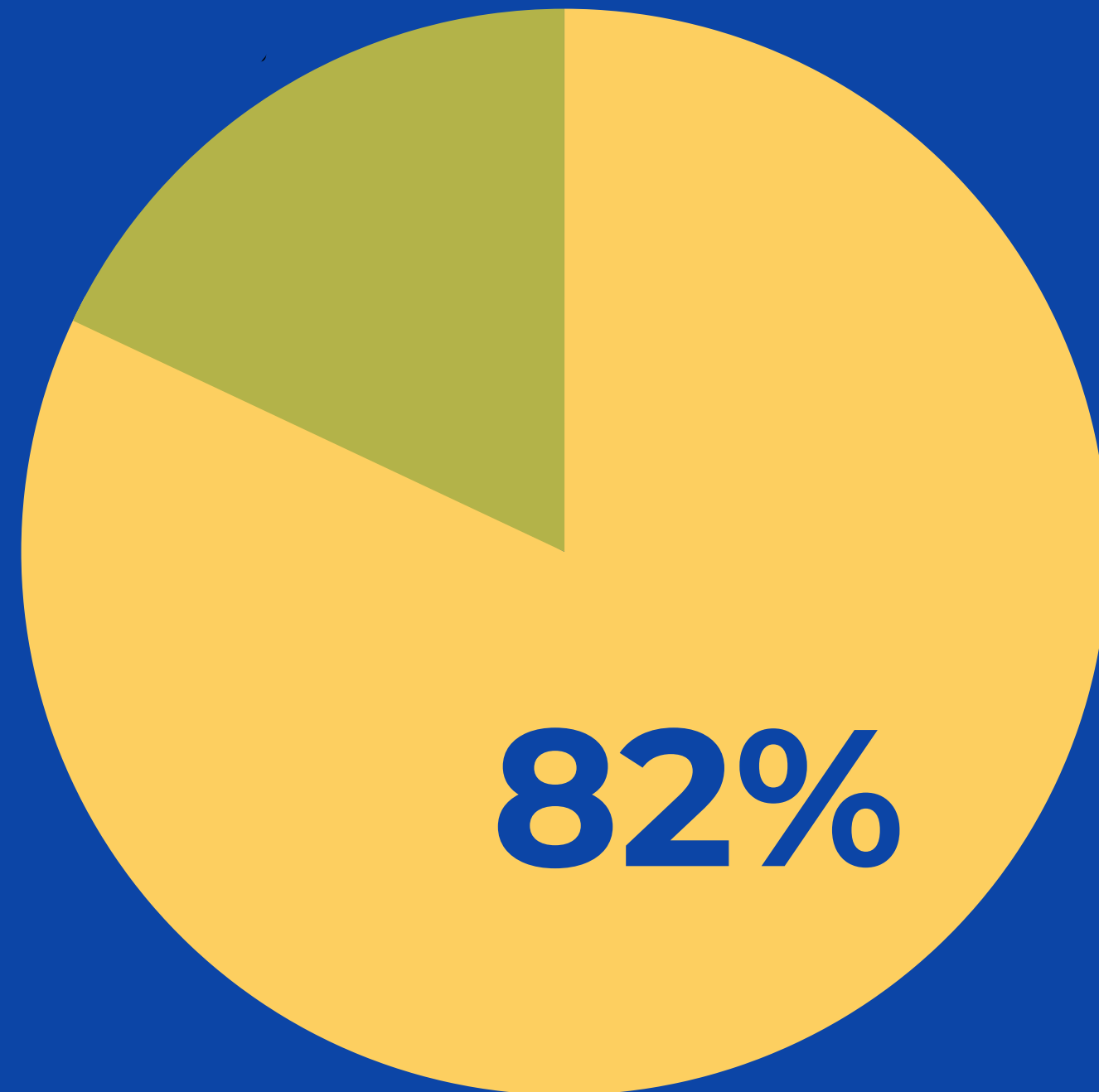


"One of the biggest reasons great candidates from diverse backgrounds don't make it to the interview process is because their applications just can't get past the bots," says Rebecca Ahmed, Corporate Managing Director at Savills North America, who has worked in HR for over a decade.

"A great first step for companies is to stop relying so heavily on AI to filter resumes by degree title or school name, and instead look for more equitable ways to assess student talent."

Working with a third party organization like Paragon One to recruit and manage intern cohorts remotely is a great way for firms that don't have the bandwidth to screen applications without artificial intelligence to inject a human perspective into the sourcing of candidates.

Further, having an independent third party involved in early talent identification programs allows companies to tackle internal biases in recruiting because they stand to benefit from blind assessments of candidates.



Last year, 82% of US employers embedded diversity efforts into their recruiting programs. With the disruption to regular hiring practices and the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement this year, organizations world over have had renewed conversations on how to improve their inclusion policies, right from their entry level hiring practices.

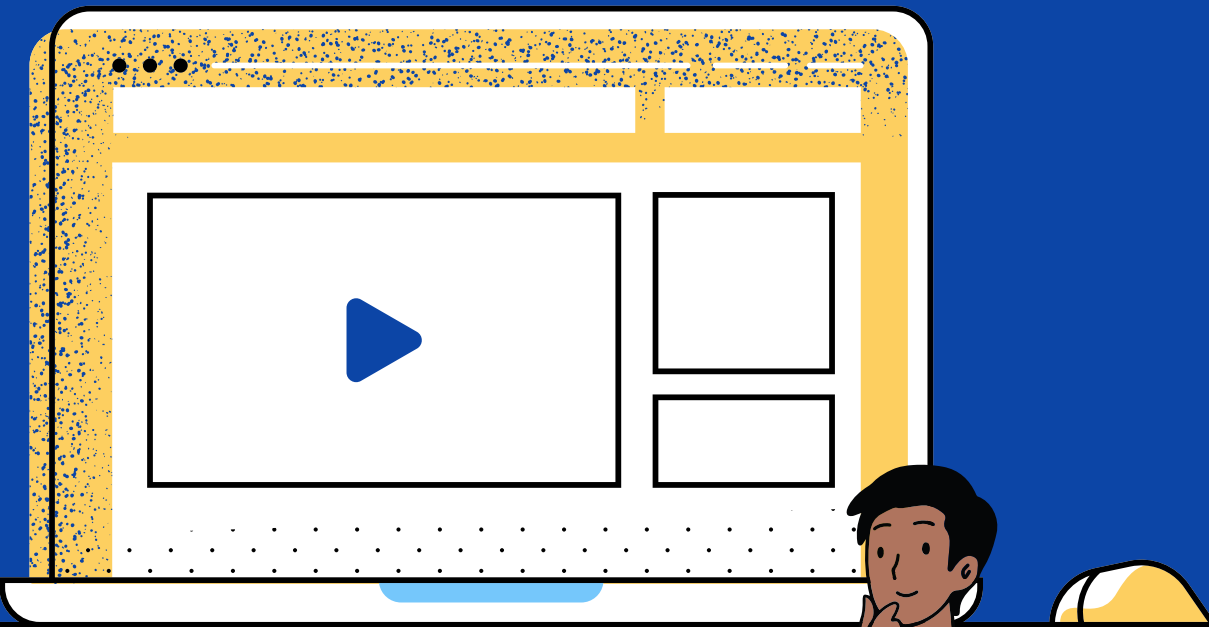


Many companies are now beginning to understand that it is not only necessary to support diverse employees, but also to recruit and mentor students when they join the workforce, so they progress in their careers.

For example, firms like hospitality brand Hilton Hotels & Resorts and financial services company Moody's have forged partnerships with historically black colleges and universities (HBCU's) and organizations that serve low-income and underrepresented students to expose them to opportunities in their respective industries, with the intent to attract future interns and workers. They also pair students with mentors to help navigate office culture, and have refined their interview processes to try and check implicit biases.

Nicole Wagner, who heads a national internship program with Compass Group, notes that companies need to stop hiring managers from automatically recruiting interns from their alma maters, because this practice undermines diversity efforts.


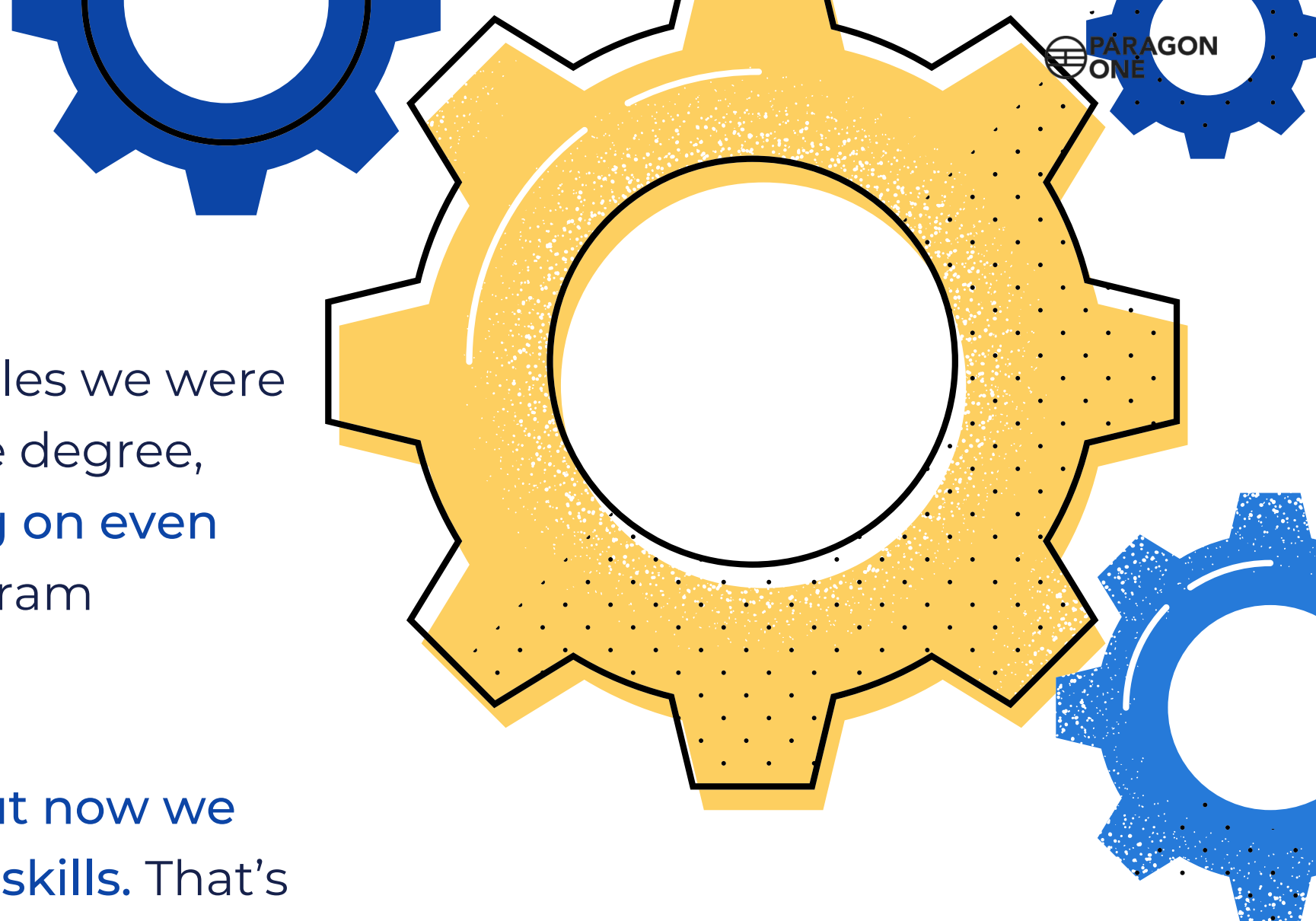
“One of the things we’re doing when recruiting students is creating a more targeted approach by building relationships with student led organizations. Clubs such as National Society of Minorities in Hospitality and Entrepreneurship & Innovation have been a great source of talent,” she said.



Big Tech in many ways is pioneering ways to scale diversity and inclusion efforts by investing more in experiential learning programs that create pathways for young people from minority backgrounds and underserved communities to begin careers in competitive fields.

A good example is **Facebook University**, an eight week hands-on, immersive internship program established to enable students from underrepresented communities to get to know Facebook's people, products and services. The program is offered to students looking to gain experience in engineering, analytics, product design, operations, and sales and advertising.

Similarly, **IBM's "New Collar" program**, which aims to recruit diverse candidates and train them through apprenticeship-style experiences, has a tagline that speaks volumes about how the tech giant is thinking of recruiting in future: *It's not about degrees, it's about skills.*



“We did an overhaul of all the job descriptions for different roles we were hiring for at IBM and eliminated the requirement of a college degree, because **we asked ourselves, ‘is the credential we are relying on even necessary for this job?’**,” explained David Leaser, Senior Program Executive, Innovation and Growth Initiatives at IBM.

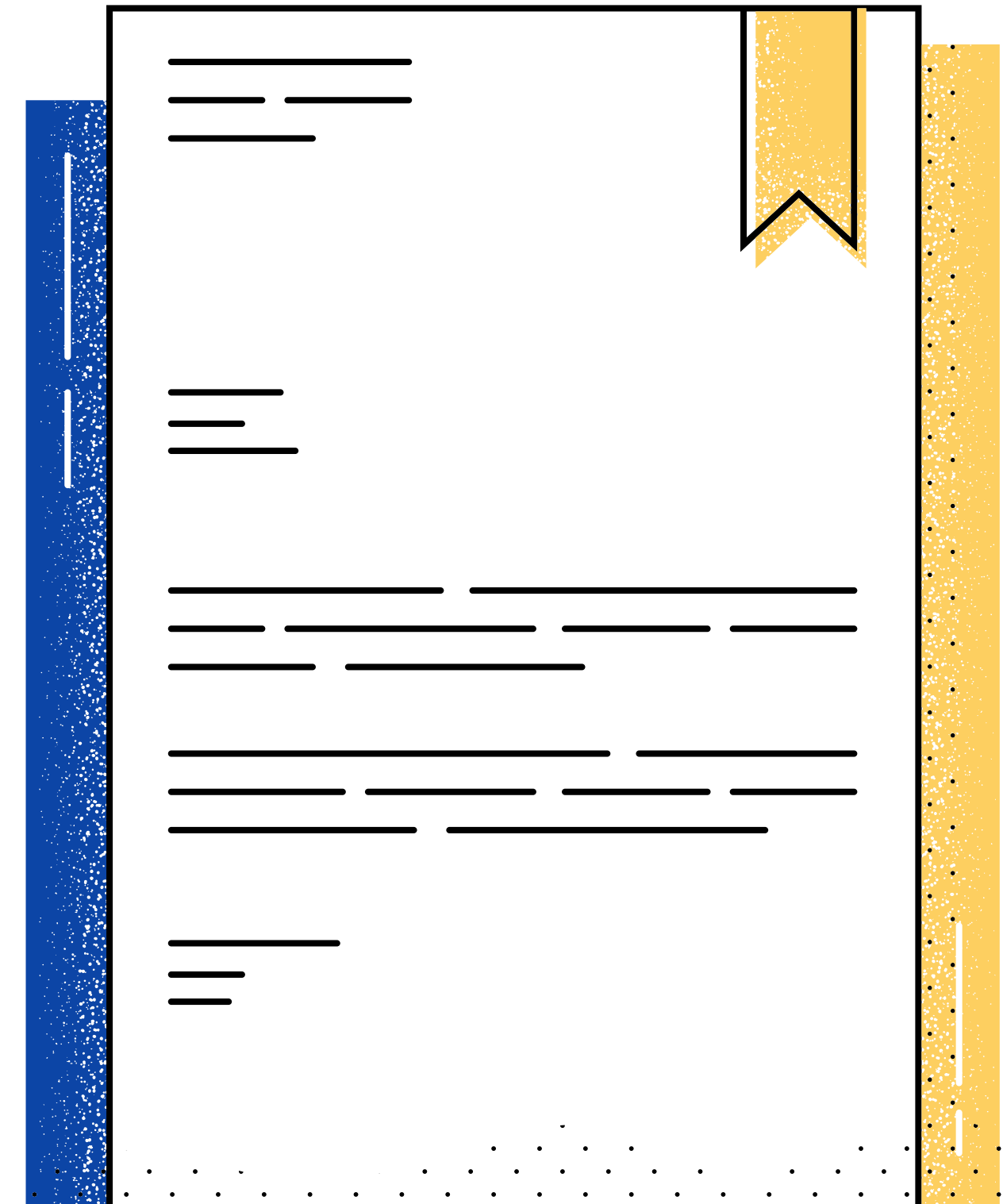
“We used to do all our recruiting from really elite schools, but now we **don’t care about college degrees as much as we care about skills.** That’s why we’re investing in experiential learning programs that help us assess talent, and actually build a more diverse and inclusive workforce.”

What stands out through initiatives of this sort is that companies are finding ways to leverage experiential learning as a way to achieve their diversity and inclusion goals, which is a far more equitable and effective approach than merely working to improve the structure and culture of teams through CSR initiatives.

Recruiters on the hunt for the perfect candidate for a position often already have that perfect candidate's resume buried in the slush pile of applications they've received. The only reason they haven't realized it is because the candidate has been unable to leverage their own network to reach the recruiter and get them to pay attention.

When it comes to establishing diverse and inclusive recruiting practices, it is counterintuitive to expect candidates from underrepresented backgrounds to have a network to leverage that will help them curry favor with recruiters. **That's why experiential learning programs are modern tools that can help employers separate the wheat from the chaff in an equitable, but also useful way.**

By running scalable work experience programs that encourage applicants from every background to apply, companies have a chance to actually work with candidates before they offer them permanent contracts. Over a period of eight to twelve weeks, they're able to assess how well a candidate will fit in with their team and culture, how motivated they are and how impactful their work is.



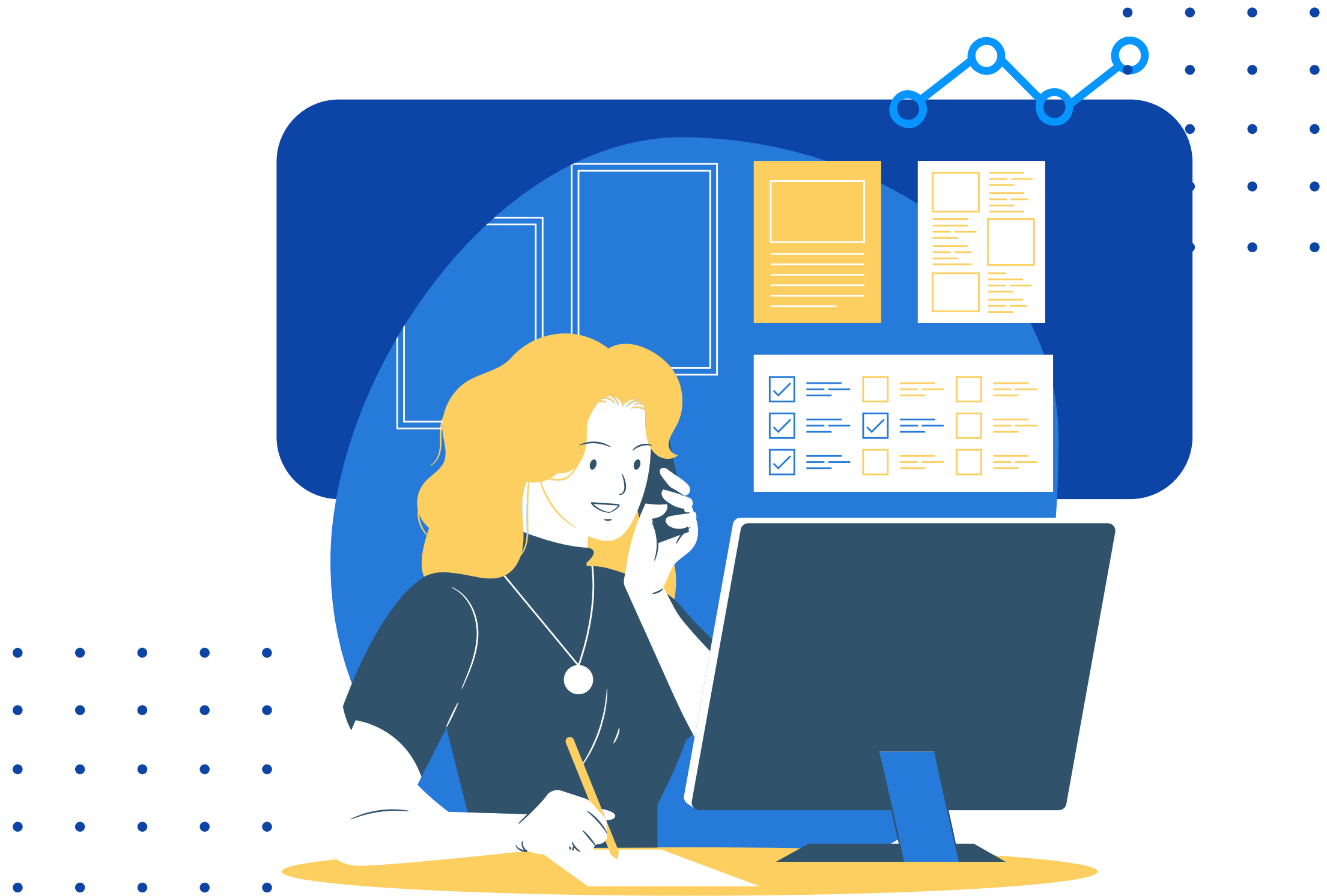
“It’s time for both companies and colleges to break the traditional recruiting model because it’s become clear the recruiting process has typically favored those who come from target schools and have social connections.

Experiential learning programs are a step in the right direction, because they mimic what it’s actually like to have to perform in the workplace and don't sugarcoat that.”

- Jerry Lee, COO of career coaching startup Wonsulting and former senior Strategy & Operations Manager at Google.



The Paragon One Approach



About

Paragon One's founders Matt Wilkerson and Byron Hsu met 18 years ago when they were engineering students at MIT. Like many college students, they discovered that graduating with great grades did not mean the right job would fall into their laps.

Their search for appropriate resources, mentors and training to lock down a career made them realize that many students with college degrees are still unprepared for the workforce. They became obsessed with finding ways to bridge the skills gap between academia and industry, and in 2017 they graduated from the YCombinator tech accelerator in Silicon Valley.

PARAGON ONE WAS BORN.

Over the past year, the company has gone from offering industry professional-led mentorship and training opportunities to young adults at the cusp of their careers, to actually providing students with real-world work experiences that prepare them for future jobs and shine through on their resumes. The problem that they recognized was that the traditional internship was both hard to scale for companies because it relied on available manager time, and limiting for students because the best opportunities were reserved for Ivy Leaguers or those who already had connections, skills, and experience. Matt and Byron felt that a technology-driven approach could solve this difficult problem.

Paragon One now partners with companies in a range of industries, from Silicon Valley giants like [Facebook](#) and [Zillow](#), to non-profits like [the Center for Education Reform](#) and venture capital firms like [Bowery Capital](#) to bring remote externship opportunities to students around the world.



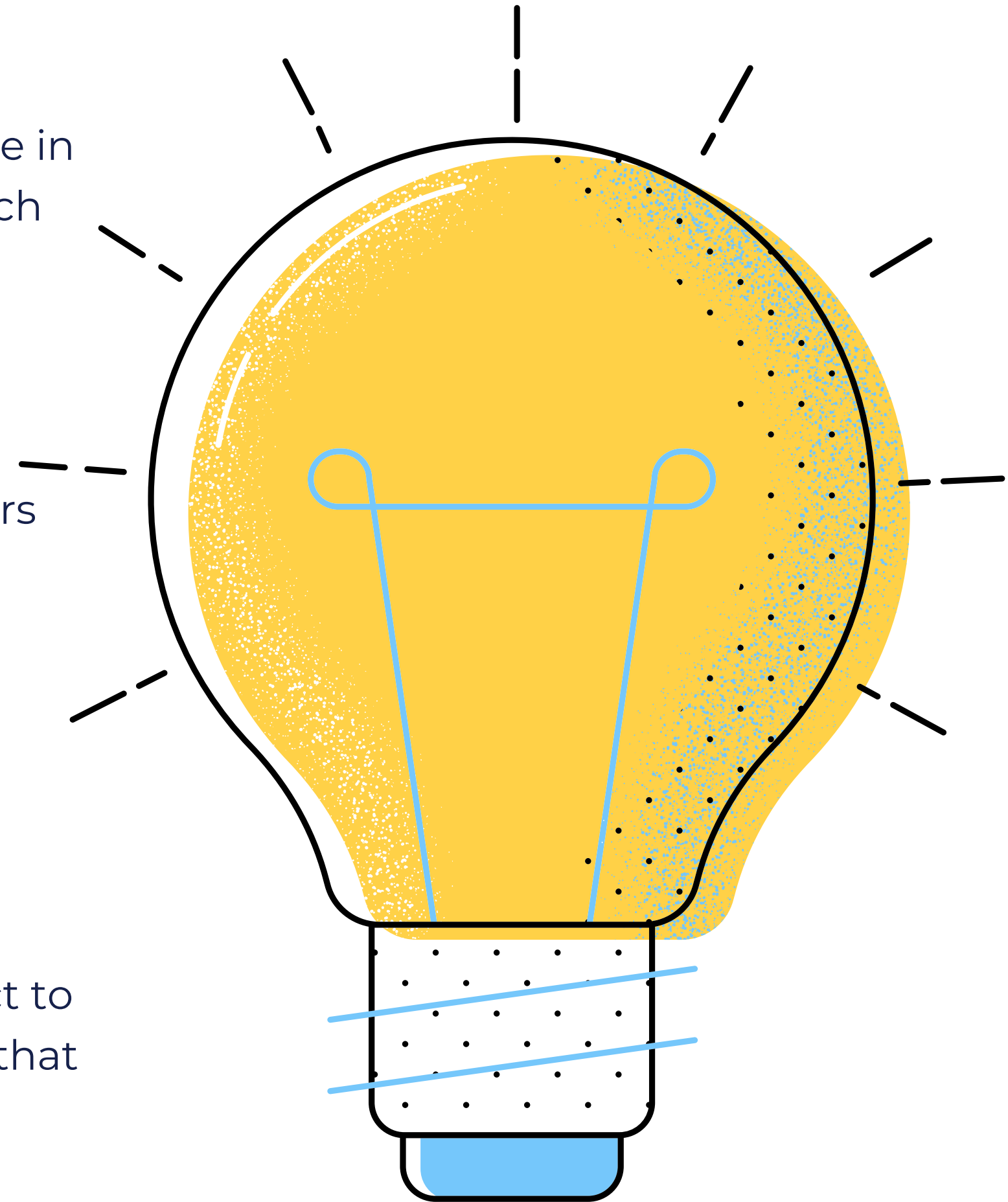
The Paragon One Approach

The role of high schools and universities is set to drastically evolve in future, when they will be called upon to actively source and match students with experiential learning opportunities.

Paragon One is providing that service to students today.

After months of research and conversations with key stakeholders in academia and industry, Paragon One developed a unique experiential learning offering called **the Remote Externship** that finally solves the access problem for students all over the world.

Students who pursue remote externships through the Paragon One platform spend six to eight weeks with a diverse, global cohort, working on a real business problem for a company. The Paragon One team collaborates with the firm offering the project to distill it into a format that students can grasp, develops training that will equip them to tackle it and manages the team from start to finish.





What is a remote externship?

Remote:

Students log in on their own devices from anywhere in the world and complete projects on their own time. They engage with program managers and each other via instant messaging and video conferencing.

Externship:

Externships are shorter than internships and are typically more structured, so students are supported with training and mentorship as they work on corporate assignments.

How do education partners benefit?

As our society explores innovative ways to better prepare the next generation of the workforce for modern careers, it is important to work within traditional higher education systems to drive change.

To do this, Paragon One partners with high schools, colleges, gap year programs and non-profits that work with students around the world to bring them experiential learning opportunities via flexible, remote externships.

Higher education will increasingly be called upon to refine their offering to better prepare students to start careers, and Paragon One's remote externship program is just one way to give students the chance to build practical, vocational skills by working on real projects for firms in several competitive industries.

“COVID-19 may have impacted the learning experience of students around the world, but at Dulwich, we see an opportunity to think out of the box to continue to deliver holistic and experiential learning. The Dulwich curriculum is especially geared with a strong progressive stance to help students develop skills that are essential for the workplace of the future and jobs that do not even exist today. Education is about preparing students for an indefinable future and this partnership with Paragon One is helping our students to be able to not only be effective, but to thrive in an unknown future environment.”

- Sian May, Director of Senior School at Dulwich College International

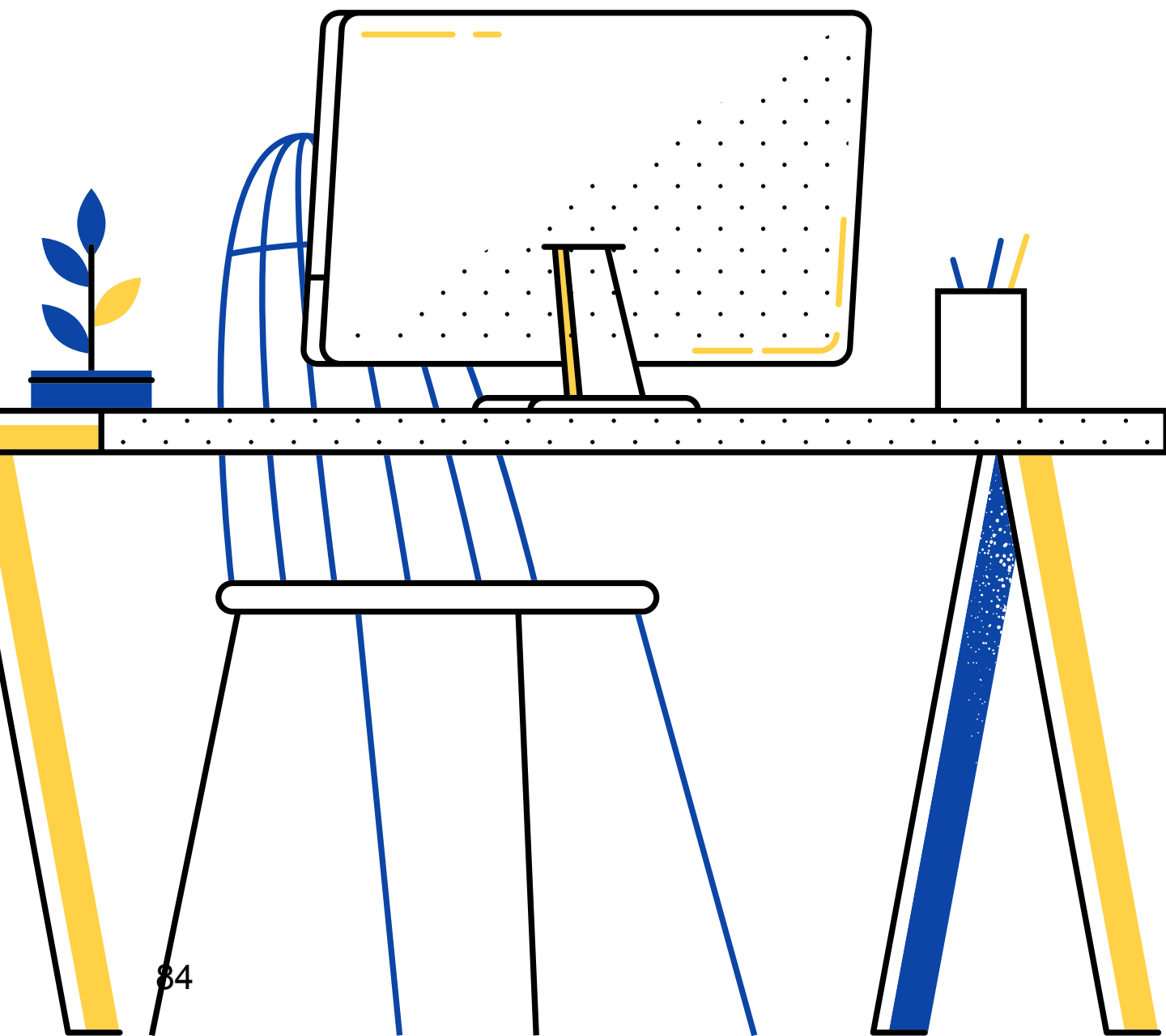


How do companies benefit?

Paragon One's remote externships are an alternative to internships that scale with just an hour of manager time each week.

They're developed in collaboration with partner companies and save managers the time and effort of recruiting, training and managing interns. We also help HR meet the company's **diversity and inclusion goals** by tapping into our multinational network over 70,000 students globally to place students in cohorts. Because students work on customized projects and present their best work to the company, the remote externships essentially serve as an eight week job interview for companies to **assess students and potentially expand their hiring pools**. Paragon One also evaluates student talent, provides **feedback and blind assessments** to companies and places students in top performance tiers to help companies evaluate their work.

Finally, Paragon One engages and mentors students to create a positive experience that grows the partner company's brand.



How do students benefit?

Because the externships are designed to be virtual, students have the **flexibility** to work and meet deadlines on their own time. At the end of their externships, students get **certifications, letters of recommendation and feedback** on their work. They are also given the chance to network with company representatives and build their profiles.

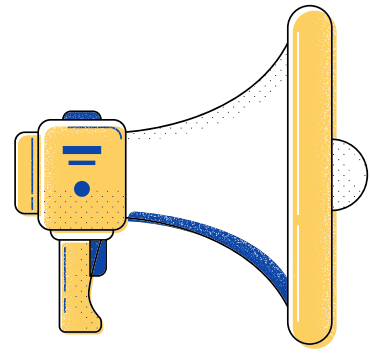
Remote externships are a great way of closing the opportunity gap and leveling the playing field, as students who live in small towns, or foreign countries can still work a Wall Street or Silicon Valley project and gain US work experience.

Working on real company projects online also teaches students to manage their time well, helps improve their research, communication and presentation skills and adds to their resume.

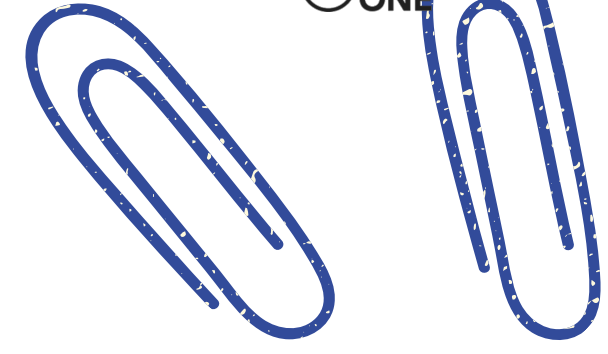
“As a first-generation college student who grew up needing to teach herself so many things... this opportunity gave me additional support in fighting my fears and believing in myself more.”

- Diana Garcia Varo, Sophomore at Syracuse University





Our work during COVID19



“Our students don’t have the social capital to navigate through the world of business on their own, so our efforts are focused on providing them with that. This year, however, we knew there weren't going to be as many internships available and a lot of the internships that we might have secured, because of the circumstances, might not exist anymore. That’s where Paragon One, with its online internships for the summer of 2020, across different industries, became a great fit.”

- Iza Benedicto, Program Associate on The Opportunity Network’s internships team

"With everything happening in the world, we were sure we wouldn't have interns this summer. This was the best experience I've had with remote hiring and managing especially interns. I should give Paragon One credit for running the whole show, because we got all the best bits where we reviewed the final work and interacted with the students, but we really didn’t have to worry about anything else, from training to finding the right externs."

- Avi Lichtenstein, Director of Operations at New York real estate technology company Younity

Get in touch

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at www.paragonone.com and reach out
to info@paragonone.com if you want to partner with us to
change the future of learning and working for the next
generation!**