

## Thrive Scholars - Research Roundup - 2024 - Edition 3

Welcome to the Thrive Scholars Research Roundup, which will be shared quarterly with you! We thought you might like to see what we are reading as we continually learn about the work that we are doing.

### College Class of 2022—How Did They Fare Post-Graduation?

The [National Association of Colleges and Employers](#) (NACE) recently released its [report](#) on the first destination outcomes of the College Class of 2022, summarizing the initial career placements for a whopping 594,000 four-year college graduates! This is the largest national survey of first destination placements and provides a benchmark for understanding our graduates' success in career entry and progress toward economic mobility. Overall, NACE found that placement rates have returned to pre-pandemic levels with 56% employed full-time, 19% continuing their education, and 3% serving in fellowships, service, or military—for a total of 78% having landed in what we, at Thrive, consider to be a "meaningful first-destination." The average salary for Bachelor's degree recipients employed full-time was \$61,869.

At Thrive, our 2022 graduates did well: 76% had a meaningful first-destination career placement within six months of graduation, and of those, the full-time employees had a salary of \$71,140. While we still have work to do to make sure that 100% of our graduates land in a meaningful placement, we are proud of the starting salary that they have achieved. We are also thrilled by our preliminary data on the College Class of 2023 showing that 79% have achieved a meaningful first-destination so far, with an average starting salary of \$74,848—growth that we will expect to continue.

### College Return on Investment, Better than the Stock Market

Despite recent [findings](#) showing concerns from many audiences about the value of higher education, new [research](#) on its return on investment still shows that it is a good investment—especially for women and students of color. Authors estimate that the return on investment is 9-10% over an individual's lifetime, which is better than the stock market! In addition, the findings show that women have a higher return than men. Students of color also have a higher return than white students, though the difference is not as large as with gender. Finally, as we know, major and career trajectory matters—engineering and computer science have the highest median returns (over 13%) with business, health, and math and science majors also exceeding 10%. Overall, these findings continue to underscore the importance of higher education for high-achieving students of color from economically disadvantaged backgrounds like our Scholars.

When you consider the lifetime return of a bachelor's degree, as researchers at Georgetown's Center on Education and the Workforce recently did in this [report](#), college increases a graduate's net lifetime earnings by \$1 million over their whole career. Aggregated across the population, this is a net increase of \$5.9 trillion in lifetime earnings across the population.

### Underemployment Continues to be an Issue for College Graduates

This new [report](#) from Strada Education Foundation and The Burning Glass Institute (or the [WSJ article](#)) highlights the issue of underemployment post-college—defined as working a job that doesn't require a college degree after attaining one. Despite the positive ROI research above, about half of college graduates are facing this issue. Authors share that although underemployment is persistent for those who experience it initially post-graduation, there are key moves students can make in college to prevent the experience. These moves include choosing a major with a substantial amount of quantitative reasoning, participating in an internship, and attaining a college-level first-destination career placement after college. At Thrive Scholars, we work with our Scholars on all of these key decision points to make sure that their college degree provides the best return possible, which is very encouraging and shows that we are doing right by our Scholars.

### Moving Latino Students into High-Paying Jobs Long-term

Diverse recently published an [article](#) about Latinos in the workforce—sharing that although Latinos make up a large percentage of the workforce, which will continue to grow in the coming decades, Latinos also have the lowest salary when compared to other groups. Diverse highlighted ¡Excelencia in Education!’s four new [reports](#) on the relationship between institutions, Latino students, and the workforce. Excelencia recommends key practices, based on their research on institutions and employers, most of which we do: focus on high-wage, high-demand career pathways, provide transition services between degree completion and employment or graduate school, and connect the Latino talent pipeline directly to employers. We employ these strategies, and the data show that for the college class of 2023, 73% of our Latino graduates attained a meaningful first-destination placement, with full-time employees having an average starting salary of \$73,933, well above the median income for the US. For those still seeking career placements, we continue to provide support through our alumni programming.

### What Makes Graduates Workforce Ready?

A recent [article](#) at Higher Ed Dive shared data from a recent survey of employers, in which 58% reported that they feel recent graduates have been underprepared for the workforce. NACE also [reported](#) that new graduates and employers have differing opinions on what new graduates are competent in—most strikingly, employers value communication, critical thinking, and teamwork but share that new grads are only proficient in teamwork. At Thrive, we work with Scholars to identify and build needed [career readiness skills](#) that prepare them to join high-salary, high-demand careers. We have begun to collect data on our Scholars’ career readiness, and we are excited to use that information to guide our programmatic decision-making and influence the field in the coming years. More to come!

### Higher Education Access—Representation at the Nation’s Public Schools

Education Trust recently did two analyses on [Black](#) and [Latino](#) student representation at US private institutions. While the share of Black and Latino students has increased at nearly all institutions, enrollment did not represent the demographics of the states from which the students came. In addition, these increases were slight—for Black students, the increase was only 2.3 percentage points at the 76% of colleges where enrollment increased. The focus on trends at these institutions is important for us because private institutions tend to be the ones that can support economically disadvantaged students like Thrive Scholars by meeting a student’s full financial need, and they are the institutions that educate many of the future leaders of the US. Moreover, the effects of the Supreme Court decision dismantling affirmative action have yet to be seen.

### Financial Trauma and Loneliness of First-Generation College Students

A recent [article](#) in U.S. News & World Report shines a light on the struggles of first-generation college students, many of which we see in our Scholars experience. According to the article, financial trauma (33%) and loneliness and isolation (23%) are the major hurdles experienced by first-generation students. We tackle these issues head-on at Thrive, where 85% of our Scholars are first-gen, and 60% come from homes earning a combined annual household income under \$45,000. To help limit financial trauma, we guide our Scholars to select top colleges with the best financial aid packages. We’re pleased to report that 80% of our recent high school grads entered college with \$0 in loans in their financial aid packages—meaning they are on track to graduate college with no debt. Addressing loneliness and isolation is equally vital. Our College Success program supports Scholars in navigating the new academic and social world of college. The impact? 80% of our current college Scholars feel a strong sense of belonging, surpassing the average for first-gen students. We continue to support talented and deserving students into greater opportunities for higher education and meaningful careers that set them up for economic mobility. Their stories of impressive achievement, combined with our program results, drive us to keep going.

