

Important Characteristics of Early Career Jobs:

# What Do Young Adults Want?

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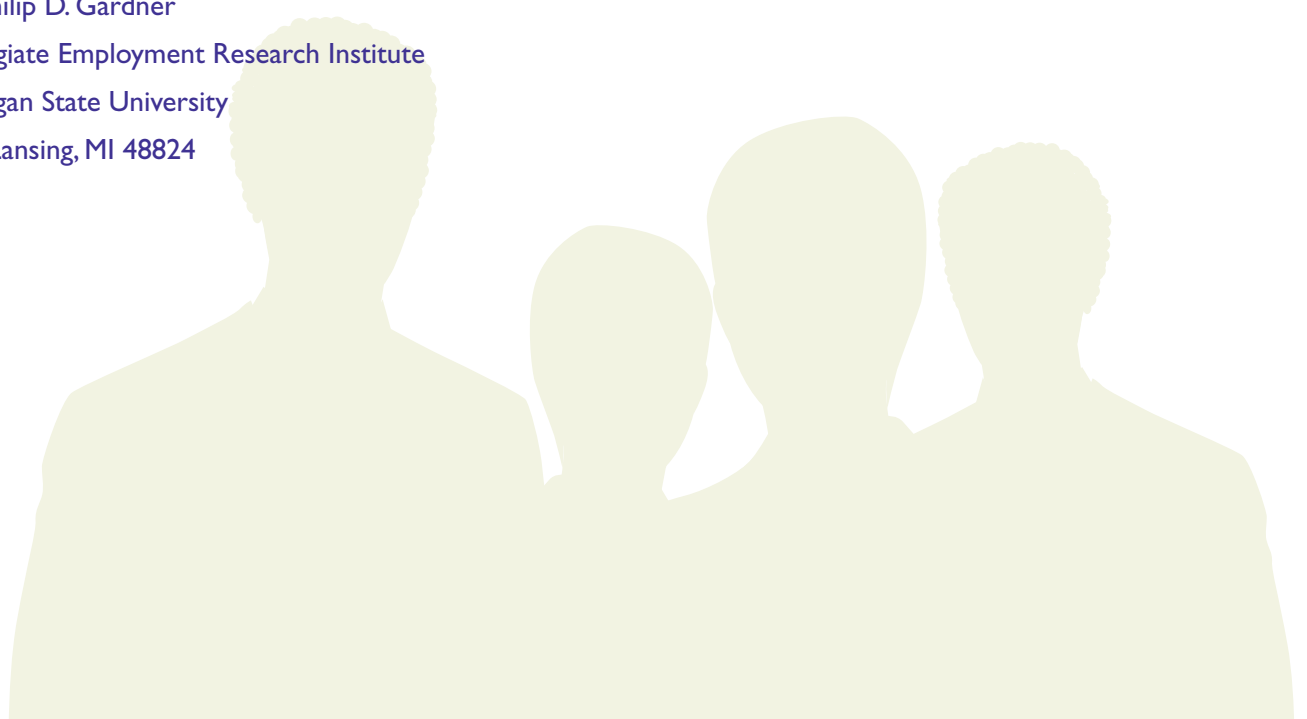
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### **White paper prepared for MonsterTRAK.com Winter 2007**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Every year in the U.S., around 3 million people graduate from high school and 1.5 million people earn college degrees. Most will begin looking for jobs and organizations that will provide satisfying careers. However, for many, the fit between themselves and their organizations is better described as a misfit. About 2 million people voluntarily quit their jobs in the U.S. every month. This figure does not include retirements, deaths, or disability reasons for quitting, and most of these people will try again to look for new jobs and satisfying careers. What are young adults looking for in their job search? Is their only concern high salaries? Or, are there other factors that influence what position they will accept? Are organizations meeting their needs? In a competitive labor market, simply offering higher salary may not be the most effective strategy to attract new talent. How employers present their companies to young adults could yield more success in attracting talent.

This report attempts to answer these questions through information collected through a survey conducted by MonsterTRAK with over 9,000 young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 responding. This large data set allows comparisons of these young adults based on gender, academic major, race, and socioeconomic class. Furthermore, additional data on 2,400 older adults allow comparisons between the newest generation of career entrants and previous generations. Finally, data from over 400 recruiters who are hiring young adults were collected by the Michigan State University's Collegiate Employment Research Institute in order to compare how recruiter's perceptions of today's young adults compare with the young people themselves.

You will learn in this report that the job characteristics young adults look for are fairly consistent across gender, ethnic affiliation, and academic major. Men place income slightly higher on their list than women. Business and computer science majors also have a higher preference for income. Family income had more to do with framing desired characteristics than any other factor. Young adults from families where income was below \$40,000 desired jobs that (1) paid well, (2) were with prestigious companies, (3) provided flexible work options, and (4) offered opportunities for promotion. Young adults from families with incomes of more than \$100,000 also sought positions that offered high salaries and were with prestigious companies.

### **The job characteristics that were rated most important included:**

a. Interesting and engaging work	88%
b. Good benefits – including health insurance	84%
c. Secure job	82%
d. Opportunities for promotion	81%
e. Opportunities to learn new skills	77%
f. Location	63%

## IMPORTANT JOB CHARACTERISTICS FOR YOUNG ADULTS

Survey respondents were asked to rate fifteen common job characteristics on how important each was in their job search. These ratings were used to determine the rank order of importance of the job characteristics and are presented in Table 1 for all young adults. Job characteristics that are related to long-term career success tended to be ranked higher than job characteristics that are more short-term oriented. Thus, characteristics such as having interesting work; good benefits, job security, and chances for promotion were generally rated as most important to a job search. In contrast, limited overtime, working in a prestigious company, travel opportunities, and limited job stress were rated as less important. The high rankings of benefits and job security most likely reflect current work trends related to reductions in benefits and organizational downsizings. Historically, benefits were generally ranked low by previous generations of young adults (Jurgensen, 1947; Turban, Eytting, &Campion, 1993). The current rise of healthcare costs have highlighted organizational efforts to cut benefit costs, perhaps making young adults more aware of the need for employee benefits.

Two relatively low rankings shed light on the current generation of young people. Despite a stereotype of young adults being preoccupied with money and materialism; a high income was rated only moderately important to a job search. In overall rankings, a high income placed 8th out of 15 job characteristics. In addition to long-term career success features, job characteristics related to quality of life (ex. geographical location and vacations) were rated as more important than a high income. Second, "being able to work independently" was ranked 11th of 15 job characteristics. Research on autonomy at work often views it as a core job characteristic that would influence work motivation and job performance (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Perhaps these young adults prefer to work in teams rather than by themselves. Such a change would match organizational strategies to move toward team-based work.

The large number of respondents to the survey allowed several comparisons of responses based on gender, race, age, and socioeconomic group (i.e., parents' income). In addition, responses from young adults were compared with parallel survey responses from organizational recruiters.

Table 1. Rank Order of 15 Job Characteristics Important to Young Adults' Job Search

RANK ORDER	JOB CHARACTERISTIC
1	Interesting work
2	Good benefits (e.g., health insurance)
3	Job security
4	Chances for promotion
5	Opportunity to learn new skills
6	Geographical location
7	Annual vacations of a week or more
8	High income
9	Flexibility in work hours
10	Regular hours – no nights/weekends
11	Being able to work independently
12	Limited job stress
13	Travel opportunities
14	Prestigious company
15	Limited overtime

# Important Characteristics of Early Career Jobs

## Comparisons between young men and women

A general comparison of men and women showed relatively few differences. Both ranked “interesting work” as the most important job characteristic in a job search. Table 2 compares these rankings; characteristics bolded for one group are significantly higher than the other group. For example, men tend to rate chances for promotion, high income, and a prestigious company as more important to their job search than women. These job characteristics can help define a person’s career for others. Thus, observers may have a better idea of how well a person’s career is faring if the pay is high, chances for promotion are good, and the company has a prestigious reputation. Given the popular stereotype of the importance of a man’s career (Lacy, Bokemeier, & Shepard, 1983); perhaps these indicators of career success are more salient to men than to women.

In contrast, women tended to rate geographical location as more important to their job search than men. Perhaps these young women want to maintain close ties to friends and family that would restrict their job search to a specific geographical location. Conversely, men may want to cast a wider net in their job search and not be bound by where the job is located.

Table 2. Comparison of Important Job Characteristics by Sex

RANK	MALES	FEMALES
1	Interesting work	Interesting work
2	<b>Chance for promotion</b>	Good benefits
3	Good benefits	Job security
4	Job security (tie with 3)	Chance for promotion
5	Opportunity to learn new skills	Opportunity to learn new skills
6	<b>High income</b>	<b>Geographical location</b>
7	Annual vacations	Annual vacations
8	Geographical location	High income
9	Flexibility in work hours	Flexibility in work hours
10	Able to work independently	Able to work independently
11	Regular hours (tie with 10)	Regular hours (tie with 10)
12	<b>Prestigious company</b>	Limited job stress
13	Limited job stress	Travel opportunities
14	Travel opportunities	Prestigious company
15	Limited overtime	Limited overtime

## **Comparisons among race groups**

In general, there were relatively few differences in how African-Americans, Asian-Americans, Caucasians, and Hispanics/Latinos rated the job characteristics. Table 3 compares these ratings for these four groups and for a group of respondents who identified their racial category as "Other." A few characteristics showed significant group differences and they are bolded. Caucasians tend to rate job security as less important than minority groups. We speculate that this majority group may not worry about discrimination and workforce diversity issues that may jeopardize job search and job retention; thus, they may be less sensitive to job security issues than minority groups.

African-Americans tend to rate flexibility in work hours as more important than other groups. We speculate that the desired flexibility may be needed to help these young adults meet family obligations. Some research has documented the extended African-American family and the need for young adults to care for their younger siblings and/or older relatives (Sarkisian, 2005).

Finally, Asian-Americans tend to rate a company's prestige as more important than other groups. Many Asian-Americans hold collectivistic values and one definition of the concept of face involves building a reputation for oneself that is based on success and ostentation (Ho, 1976). These values would promote a concern for how others view them. Within this context, association with a prestigious company would impress others and give the Asian-American face.

# Important Characteristics of Early Career Jobs

Table 3. Comparison of Important Job Characteristics by Race

RANK	TOTAL	AFRICAN-AMERICAN	ASIAN-AMERICAN	HISPANIC	CAUCASIAN	OTHER
1	Interesting work	Job security	Interesting work	Interesting work	Interesting work	Interesting work
2	Good benefits	Good benefits	Job security	Job security	Good benefits	Good benefits
3	Job security	Interesting work	Chance for promotion	Good benefits	Chance for promotion	Job security
4	Chance for promotion	Chance for promotion	Opportunity to learn new skills	Chance for promotion	<b>Job security</b>	Chance for promotion
5	Opportunity to learn new skills	Opportunity to learn new skills	Good benefits	Opportunity to learn new skills	Opportunity to learn new skills	Opportunity to learn new skills
6	Geographical location	<b>Flexibility in work hours</b>	Geographical location	Geographical location	Geographical location	Geographical location
7	Annual vacations	High income	High income	High income	Annual vacations	Annual vacations
8	High income	Annual vacations	Annual vacations	Annual vacations	High income	High income
9	Flexibility in work hours	Geographical location	<b>Prestigious company</b>	Flexibility in work hours	Regular hours	Flexibility in work hours
10	Regular hours	Limited job stress	Flexibility in work hours	Regular hours	Flexibility in work hours	Able to work independently
11	Able to work independently	Able to work independently	Able to work independently	Able to work independently	Able to work independently	Limited job stress
12	Limited job stress	Regular hours	Regular hours	Limited job stress	Limited job stress	Regular hours
13	Travel opportunity	Travel opportunity	Limited job stress	Prestigious company	Travel opportunity	Travel opportunity
14	Prestigious company	Prestigious company	Travel opportunity	Travel opportunity	Prestigious company	Prestigious company
15	Limited overtime	Limited overtime	Limited overtime	Limited overtime	Limited overtime	Limited overtime

## Comparisons among academic programs

Young adults hold fairly consistent preferences for job characteristics they are seeking, regardless of academic program. Among the top ten ranked characteristics by major, as reported in Table 4, professional majors (including business, engineering, computer sciences, and health) rated high income slightly higher than other majors. Business and computer science young adults tended to place the highest preference on salary. There were a few interesting differences attributed to major. Business young adults placed promotions at the top of their rankings while health majors ranked benefits first. Engineering and computer sciences majors emphasized security as their second-ranked preference. Health majors ranked flexibility higher than other majors while computer science majors placed opportunity to learn new skills higher than the others. Among liberal arts, communication, social science and science (physical and biological), the need for independent work was included in their top ten. These subtle differences suggest that tailoring job offers may be necessary to attract certain types of young adults into a company.

Table 4. Comparison of Important Job Characteristics by Academic Program

RANK	BUSINESS	ENGINEERING	COMPUTER SCIENCE	HEALTH	COMMUNICATION
1	<b>Promotion</b>	Interesting work	Interesting work	<b>Benefits</b>	Interesting Work
2	Interesting work	<b>Security</b>	<b>Security</b>	Interesting work	Benefits
3	Benefits	Promotion	<b>Opportunity to learn</b>	Security	Promotion
4	Security	Opportunity to learn	Benefits	Opportunity to learn	Security
5	Opportunity to learn	Benefits	Promotion	Promotion	Opportunity to learn
6	<b>High income</b>	Vacations	<b>High income</b>	<b>Flexibility</b>	Location
7	Location	High income	Vacations	Location	Vacations
8	Vacation	Location	Location	Vacations	High income
9	Regular hours	Flexibility	Flexibility	High income	Flexibility
10	Flexibility	Regular hours	Regular hours	Reduced stress	<b>Independent work</b>

RANK	SOCIAL SCIENCE	PHYSICAL/ BIOSCIENCE	LIBERAL ARTS	UNDECIDED
1	Interesting Work	Interesting work	Interesting work	Interesting work
2	Benefits	Benefits	Benefits	Security
3	Security	Security	Security	Benefits
4	Promotion	Promotion	Opportunity to learn	Promotions
5	Opportunity to learn	Opportunity to learn	Promotion	Opportunity to learn
6	Location	Location	Location	Location
7	Vacations	Vacations	Vacations	High Income
8	High income	High Income	Flexibility	Flexibility
9	Flexibility	Flexibility	High Income	Vacations
10	<b>Independent work</b>	<b>Independent Work</b>	<b>Independent Work</b>	<b>Independent Work</b>



# Important Characteristics of Early Career Jobs

## Comparisons among socioeconomic classes

Young adults from different socioeconomic classes may be attracted to different job characteristics. Parents' income was used to measure socioeconomic class and six job characteristics revealed differences among young adults. Three job characteristics with similar relationships to parents' income are shown in Figure 1. Job security, flexibility in work hours, and the importance of having a job with limited stress showed negative relationships with parents' income. Thus, the higher the socioeconomic class, the less likely these job characteristics were rated as important.

Figure 1. Importance of Job Security, Flexibility in Work Hours and Limited Job Stress for Young Adults by Parents' Income



In contrast, higher socioeconomic class was positively related to the importance ratings of geographical location. Figure 2 shows that young adults whose parents made over \$100,000 were more likely to rate geographical location as an important job characteristic in their job search than young adults whose parents made less than \$20,000. Finally, two job characteristics are graphed in Figure 3; where high salary and a prestigious company were rated similarly by young adults in the extreme socioeconomic categories. Of the six groupings, young adults in low (< \$20,000) and high (> \$100,000) classes rated a high salary and prestigious company as more important to their job searches than their counterparts in moderate socioeconomic classes (above \$20,000 and less than \$100,000). Money and prestige may be most salient to those people who don't have it (the lowest socioeconomic group) and those who have it (the highest socioeconomic group).

Figure 2. Importance of Geographical Location for Young Adults by Parents' Income

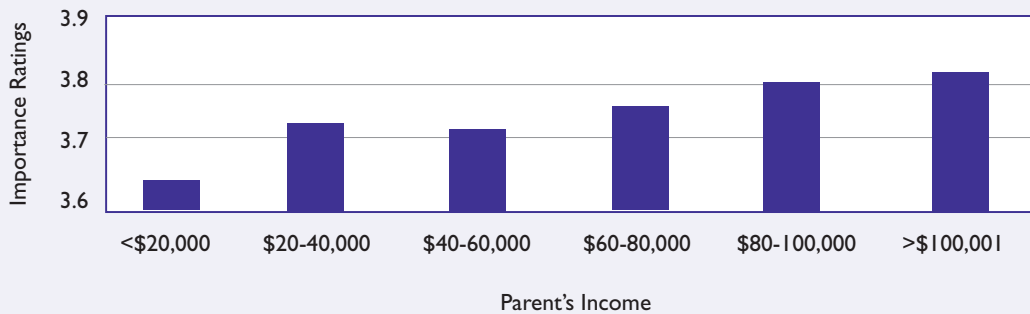
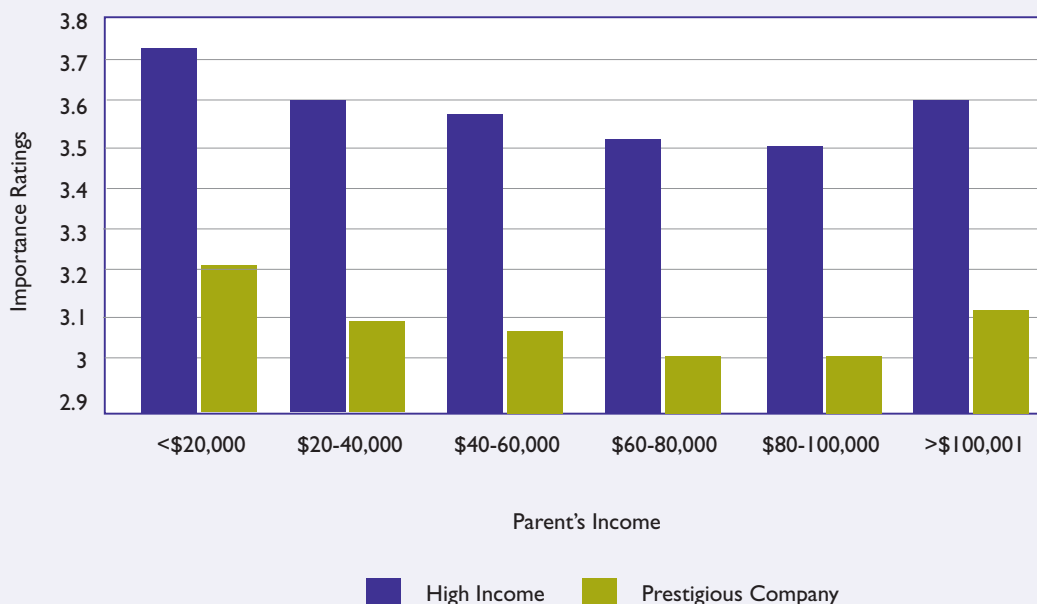


Figure 3. High Income and Working for a Prestigious Company for Young Adults by Parents' Income



# Important Characteristics of Early Career Jobs

## Comparisons among age groups

Finally, the overall rankings of the 15 job characteristics were compared across three age groups: Young adults (ages 18-25), and two older adult groups (ages 26-35 and ages 36-67). The general rankings across these three age groups were similar and are shown in Table 5, with three exceptions bolded. First, young adults rated “being able to work independently” as less important than other age groups. Given that this group is relatively inexperienced, they could benefit from working with others rather than take full responsibility working alone. Second, adults in our middle group rated chances for promotion as more important than the other age groups. These adults have some experience and may be most likely to receive promotions. Finally, the adults in our oldest group rated high income as less important than the other age groups. Perhaps at this life stage, financial demands have stabilized and a high income is no longer a focus for this group.

Table 5. Comparison of Important Job Characteristics by Age Group

RANK	15-25	26-35	36-67
1	Interesting work	Interesting work	Interesting work
2	Good benefits	<b>Promotions</b>	Good benefits
3	Job security	Good benefits	Job security
4	Promotions	Opportunity to learn new skills	Opportunity to learn new skills
5	Opportunity to learn new skills	Job security	Promotions
6	Geographic location	Vacation	Vacation
7	Vacation	Geographic location	Geographic location
8	High income	High income	Independent work
9	Flexible hours	Independent work	Flexible hours
10	Reg. hours	Flexible hours	Reg. hours
11	<b>Independent work</b>	Reg. hours	<b>High income</b>
12	Limited stress	Limited stress	Limited stress
13	Prestigious company	Prestigious company	Limited overtime
14	Travel	Travel	Prestigious company
15	Limited overtime	Limited overtime	Travel

## HOW RECRUITERS VIEW IMPORTANT JOB CHARACTERISTICS OF YOUNG ADULTS

Table 6 compares the relative importance of job characteristics for young adults and organizational recruiters. The same set of job characteristics were presented to both groups and recruiters were instructed to rate how important they believed each characteristic was to young adults. Comparisons between the two groups showed several discrepancies between what young adults believe are important to them and how organizations perceived what young adults wanted in a job. The job characteristics that were rated significantly higher by one group are bolded.

Recruiters thought young adults would rate high income and company prestige higher than they actually did. In addition, recruiters thought young adults would rate job security and benefits lower than they actually did. This misalignment of ratings may lead some recruiters to emphasize income and company prestige when young adults would rather hear about benefits and job security. Such a recruitment strategy is not likely to impress many young adults (Posner, 1981).

Table 6. Comparison of Important Ratings of Job Characteristics Between Young Adults and Organizational Recruiters

RANK	YOUNG ADULTS	RECRUITERS
1	Interesting work	Interesting work
2	<b>Good benefits</b>	Chance for promotion
3	<b>Job security</b>	Opportunity to learn new skills
4	Chance for promotion	<b>High income</b>
5	Opportunity to learn new skills	Good benefits
6	Geographical location	Geographical location
7	Annual vacations	Job security
8	High income	<b>Prestigious company</b>
9	Flexibility in work hours	Annual vacations
10	Regular hours (tie with 11)	Able to work independently
11	Able to work independently	Regular hours (tie with 12)
12	Limited job stress	Flexibility in work hours
13	Travel opportunities	Limited overtime
14	Prestigious company	Limited job stress
15	Limited overtime	Travel opportunities

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR RECRUITING AND RETAINING YOUNG ADULTS**

1. Promote and manage interesting work projects for new hires that maximize the value these people bring to the organization.
2. Recognize that subjective factors may play a more dominate role in a young adult's decision to work for a company than salary. Income is important; yet the restrictive range of starting salaries shifts the decision to less objective characteristics, such as vacation, location, and opportunities.
3. Be aware that benefits and job security are salient job features that employers need to focus on early in the recruiting process. Benefits, a central concern for parents, will be a deciding factor for many in the choice of a first job.
4. In dealing with men and women, realize that there are subtle differences in what they are seeking. Men will respond to salary discussions and are less restrictive in the locations they will consider; women are more focused on job security, benefits, and location.
5. Understand that socioeconomic status enters significantly into the job decision. Young adults from families with low income are concerned about the level of income they receive, the prestige of the company they join, and the flexibility of the position. Young adults from high income families are also interested in high income and company prestige. These ends of the income scale are operating from very different perspectives and need to be approached differently during the recruiting process.

## SUMMARY

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In summary, most young adults want the same things in their first career-related jobs: Interesting work, good benefits, job security, and the chance for promotion. These job characteristics describe a long-term relationship for young adults to develop satisfying careers within an organization. A closer examination of these ratings shows some significant differences:

- **In gender comparisons:**
  - Men rated chance for promotion, high income, and a prestigious company as more important in their job search than women.
  - Women rated geographical location as a more important job characteristic to their job search than men.
- **In comparisons among racial groups:**
  - African-Americans rated flexibility in work hours as more important than other groups.
  - Asian-Americans rated a prestigious company as more important than other groups.
  - Caucasian-Americans rated job security as less important than minority groups.
- **In comparisons among academic majors:**
  - Business and computer science majors rated salary as more important than all other majors.
  - Business majors listed promotions as their top job characteristic.
  - Health professions rated flexibility in the position as more important than other majors.
- **In comparisons among socioeconomic classes:**
  - Job security, flexibility in work hours, and the desire for a job with limited stress were negatively related to parents' income. Thus, young adults in more affluent homes were less likely to rate these factors as important in their job search.
  - Geographical location was positively related to parents' income. Thus, young adults in more affluent homes were more likely to rate geographical location as important in their job search.
  - A U-shape relationship was found between parents' income and two job characteristics: high salary and a prestigious company. Thus, young adults in low and high socioeconomic groups were more likely to rate these factors as important in their job search, compared to young adults in more moderate socioeconomic groups.
- **In comparisons among age groups:**
  - Young adults (ages 18-25) rated being able to work independently as less important than other age groups.
  - Adults between the ages of 26-35, rated the chance for promotion as more important than other age groups.
  - Adults over age 36 rated high salary as less important than other age groups.
- **In comparisons between young adults and organizational recruiters:**
  - Recruiters perceived a high income and a prestigious company as more important to young adults than young adults rating themselves.
  - Recruiters perceived good benefits and job security as less important to young adults than young adults rating themselves.

The differences reported in this white paper are based on statistical analyses – subjective judgments on how meaningful these differences are to particular organizations may need to be considered. In today's competitive business climate, an organization's human resources are often viewed as a competitive edge. In order to attract, select and retain the best talent, organizations are challenged to meet the demands of a new generation of young adults (Arnett, 2004). A better understanding of how different groups of young people perceive general job characteristics may help organizations design recruitment strategies that best meet their needs.

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## RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP

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### **About MonsterTRAK**

Founded in 1987 as JobTRAK and acquired in 2000 by Monster®, the leading online global career and recruitment resource, MonsterTRAK is a leading college recruitment solution that successfully connects employers with college students, recent graduates and career centers. MonsterTRAK provides a wide range of entry-level, part-time and internship job listings, along with resources that enable students to develop and execute their own career management strategies. Recognized for the last five years by Student Monitor for offering world-class customer service, MonsterTRAK maintains superior relationships with more than 3,100 college and university career centers, MBA programs and alumni associations nationwide. For more information, please visit [www.monstertrak.com](http://www.monstertrak.com) or call 1-800-999-TRAK.

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### **About Collegiate Employment Research Institute (CERI) at Michigan State University**

CERI, established in 1985, is nationally recognized for its research on the transition from college to work; employment readiness of college graduates; and the transition experience through college ("the sophomore year"). The Institute is also involved in the assessment of learning in the workplace; assessment practices for University accountability (outcome assessment); and evaluation of integrated learning opportunities. CERI annually publishes Recruiting Trends that provides an analysis of the college labor market. For information on the Institute, visit <http://ceri.msu.edu>, or call us at 517-355-2211.

### **About Dr. Georgia Chao**

Georgia T. Chao is Associate Professor of Management at the Eli Broad College of Business at Michigan State University. Prior to joining the MSU management faculty, she was Section Head of the Department of Management at the General Motors Institute. Her primary research interests lie in the areas of career development, organizational socialization, and cultural issues in organizational behavior. Dr. Chao has published a number of articles in these areas and has conducted training and applied research at General Motors, Ford, AT&T, Singer, and other organizations. She received the Academy of Management award for the Outstanding Publication in Organizational Behavior in 1995. In 2000, she was named a Fellow of the American Psychological Association and the Society of Industrial and Organizational Psychology. Dr. Chao currently serves on four editorial boards and chairs the American Psychological Association's Committee on International Relations in Psychology.

### **About Dr. Phil Gardner**

Phil Gardner is the Director of the Collegiate Employment Research Institute at Michigan State University. Prior to joining MSU, he was on the faculty at the University of California, Riverside. His primary research interest cover the transition from college to work, early career dynamics of young adults, impact of co-curricular activities on career aspirations and achievement, and college labor markets. Dr. Gardner has published his work in variety of publications and speaks frequently on college campuses and before employer associations. He received the Academy of Management award for Outstanding Publication in Organizational Behavior (with Dr. Chao) in 1995. Dr. Gardner currently serves as senior editor of the Journal of Cooperative Education and Internships.



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