

UNDERGRADUATE PERSPECTIVES:

The Business of Changing the World

2010





The close of the decade was fraught with anxiety for the future of the business world. Making the realization that poor corporate behavior led to a global financial meltdown and the highest unemployment rates since the Great Depression, the world questioned how we can ensure tomorrow's business leaders act more responsibly.

Net Impact's 2007 *New Leaders, New Perspectives II* study of undergraduate student opinions revealed that undergraduates—not just MBAs—were highly interested in topics related to corporate responsibility and socially responsible employment opportunities. Responding to demand, Net Impact launched its undergraduate network, which has grown to more than 40 chapters.

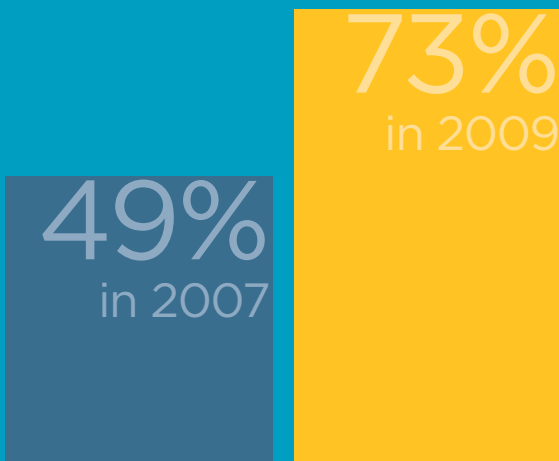
How have undergrads' perceptions evolved over the past few tumultuous years? With this update, Net Impact surveyed 1,650 undergraduate students on their beliefs about the current state of business, the role they see themselves playing in improving the world through their careers, and whether or not they are prepared to act on those ambitions and ideals.



More Opportunity for Business to Do Good

There has been a profound shift in undergraduate support of business working towards the greater good. Over the last few years, more students believe the for-profit sector should address social and environmental issues. In 2007, 82% of undergrads agreed that businesses should be involved; in 2009, this percentage rose to 88%. More specifically, 46% say they strongly agree on this topic, compared to only 32% in 2007.

More undergrads agree that responsible practices can lead to business profits.



Q: Corporate social responsibility makes good business sense because it leads to financial profits.

88% believe the for-profit sector should address social and environmental issues.

Yet only **37%** believe corporations are working towards the betterment of society.

Q: The for-profit sector should play a role in addressing social and environmental issues.

Q: I believe that most corporations are currently working towards the betterment of society.

Good for business, good for the world.

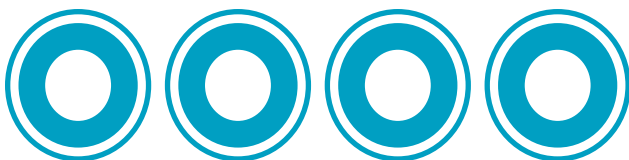
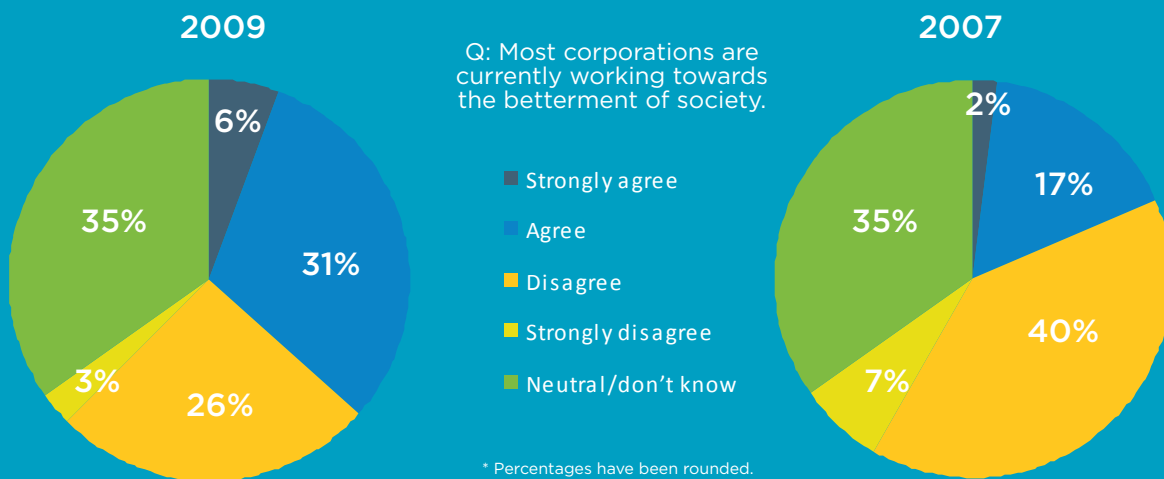
Additionally, students recognize social and environmental involvement as an ethical and fiscal benefit for companies: today, 73% of undergrads agree good corporate responsibility practices can lead to business profits, up from 49% in 2007.

But most undergrads do not believe their values are being reflected by corporate executives. Nearly all students agree ethical behavior is a necessary quality in a leader—96% rank it as either “extremely important” or “very important”—yet only 24% of students think today’s business leaders demonstrate it.

Less than one quarter of undergraduate students believe that today’s business leaders demonstrate ethical behavior.

Q: Most business leaders today exhibit ethical behavior.

Despite student lack of confidence in business leader’s ethics, twice as many (37%) today believe corporations in general are currently working towards the betterment of society, compared to 19% in 2007. However, the percentage of strong believers is small—only 6%. What’s more, 35% of students are neutral or unsure about whether corporations are doing good. The reason for this seemingly incongruent data is unclear.





Undergrads to the Rescue

This is where today's undergrads see themselves fitting into the puzzle: as **leaders who will change the world**. Nearly three-quarters of respondents (74%) see themselves as champions of social and environmental issues in the future. Net Impact members are particularly committed to these causes: 92% of them envision themselves as future leaders for social and environmental change.

74% of undergrads envision themselves as a leader who will improve the world's social or environmental challenges.

Q: Do you envision yourself to be a leader who will improve the world's social or environmental challenges?

Equally encouraging is that 84% of all students say they will seek employment that is socially responsible during their careers, up from 77% in 2007. What's more, undergrads see opportunity to make a difference all around them. Beyond obvious "do-gooder" careers in education or medicine, a majority agree they can do good through business: 52% say business can create positive impact to a great degree; another 38% agree it can cause change to a moderate degree. This is a promising sign, given 72% of respondents currently or expect to major in business/management, and 60% intend to enter the for-profit sector after graduation.

Undergrads will seek socially responsible employment during their careers.



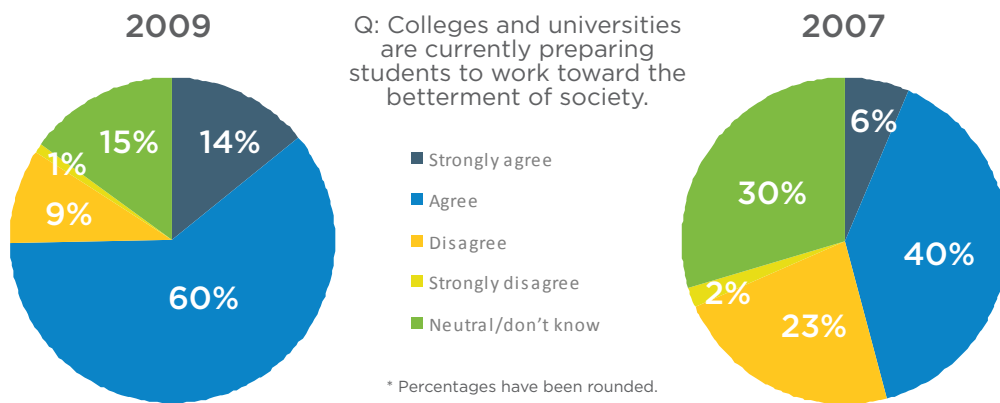
Q: During my career, I will seek employment that is socially responsible.



But are they Prepared?

Are undergrads, leaders of our future, prepared for the task? Most say yes, but simultaneously demand more education.

Most undergrads (82%) think their schools are doing a fair job of preparing them for their post-graduate interests. 75% of students are also confident their colleges are preparing them to specifically do good in the world, a significant increase from only 46% in 2007.



At the same time, students perceive room for improvement in their studies. 77% of the undergrads surveyed say colleges and universities should place more emphasis on training socially and environmentally responsible individuals than they currently do. This is a slight increase from 74% in 2007.

Today's undergraduates feel they have at least a moderate understanding of issues like corporate responsibility and environmental sustainability, but lack the same level of confidence in international development, social entrepreneurship, and nonprofit management.

Q: What is your level of knowledge for the following topics?

	Thorough knowledge	Moderate knowledge	Little knowledge	No knowledge
Corporate social responsibility	28%	50%	19%	3%
Environmental sustainability	22%	55%	21%	2%
International development	12%	45%	37%	6%
Social entrepreneurship	13%	42%	38%	8%
Nonprofit management	8%	35%	47%	10%



Despite existing moderate knowledge across the board, students want to learn more about these topics. On the topic of corporate social responsibility, for instance, 78% claim they have at least a moderate understanding, yet 84% would like to learn more.

Q: Would you like to learn more about any of the following topics while pursuing your bachelor's degree?

	Yes, definitely	Possibly	No, I know a sufficient amount	No, I'm not interested	Uncertain
Corporate social responsibility	47%	37%	10%	5%	2%
Environmental sustainability	45%	36%	9%	8%	1%
International development	51%	36%	5%	7%	2%
Social entrepreneurship	44%	40%	6%	9%	2%
Nonprofit management	37%	40%	8%	13%	2%

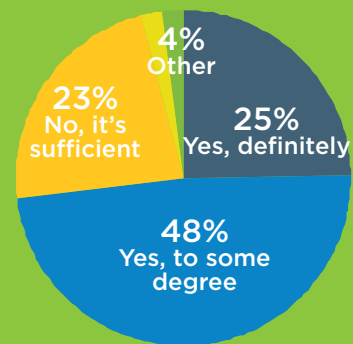
What about business majors?

86% of business majors believe corporate responsibility is a topic that needs to be integrated into undergrad business curriculum. 84% of all undergrads, regardless of major, agree on this—an increase from 72% in 2007.

In evaluating their programs, only 23% of business majors believe their current level of corporate responsibility and sustainability education is sufficient. 73% think that *more* is needed in their classes.

Picking the best ways to change their curricula, business students most commonly choose encouraging professors to include case studies and examples (42%). They also highly rank integrating sustainability themes into core curriculum (39%), bringing in experts and leaders as guest speakers (33%), increasing the number of related electives (33%), and providing corporate responsibility and sustainability internships (31%).

73% of business majors think they need more corporate responsibility and sustainability content.



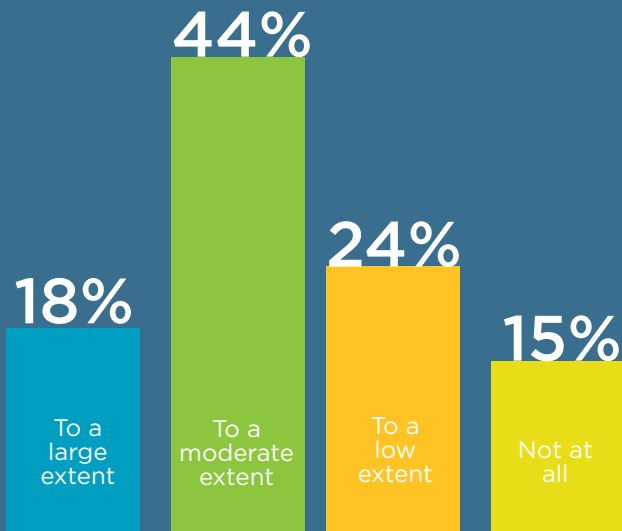
Q: The curriculum at my business program should include more content related to corporate social responsibility and sustainability.

Ideals, Meet Reality.

Although they are facing the roughest job market in years, a significant percentage of undergraduates (59%) still consider their post-graduation employment prospects as “very good.” Most students also do not deny that the economic shake-up has them rethinking their career goals.

When it comes to determining their post-graduation career paths, undergrads are indeed considering the value of ethics and corporate responsibility—but their ideals are challenged by the realities of entering the workforce and seeking their first full-time positions.

The economic crisis led undergrads to reconsider their career goals.

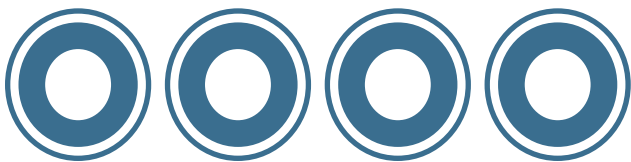


Q: To what extent has the current economic crisis caused you to re-think your career objectives?

Q: What are the top three most important factors you consider when selecting a job?

Work/life balance	49%
Compensation/benefits	43%
Passion for the objectives of the organization	39%
Challenging & diverse job responsibilities	29%
Potential to contribute to society	26%
Job security	25%
Cultural fit/like-minded people	25%
High ethical standards	21%
Opportunities to travel/work internationally	20%
Opportunities for training and development	20%
Opportunities for rapid advancement	15%
Colleagues whom I respect	14%

Ranking the top three factors driving their career choices, students consistently choose work/life balance, compensation/benefits, and passion for the objectives of the organization. Potential to contribute to society is a top motivator for 26% of undergrads. While this ranking does fall below the obvious concerns of work/life balance and compensation, students do feel that potential to contribute to society is more important than job security or opportunities for rapid advancement and professional development.



Realizing their Full Potential

Since 2007, undergraduate opinions have shifted in significant and promising ways. It is clear they are more likely to believe business should play a role in helping solve world challenges and dramatically more likely to believe that by doing so, corporate bottom lines will benefit. And yet, while they would like companies to do more, their overall perceptions of business' efforts to work toward the greater good are improving. More than ever, undergrads will be looking for socially responsible career paths and seeking additional educational support along the way.

It will be the task of universities, companies, and organizations like Net Impact to ensure student ideals translate into action as they become tomorrow's leaders; that their commitment to bettering society works with—not against—traditional career concerns.

How Net Impact Can Help

We can help undergrads rise to the challenge by giving them the education they need and showing them how values can channel into responsible—and profitable—careers.

Thousands have turned Net Impact to enhance their educational experience through involvement in a student Net Impact chapter. If your **college or university** does not yet have a Net Impact chapter, please contact us to get one started. In 2010, Net Impact plans to develop additional resources to help undergraduates identify careers with social and environmental meaning, and is currently

looking for university, nonprofit, and corporate partners to participate in this project.

If your **company or foundation** is interested in supporting this new generation of young adults to make a social and environmental impact, we encourage you to contact Net Impact about opportunities to work together. Net Impact is the leading group on college campuses today focusing on corporate responsibility and careers with impact, and we are always looking for new partners to enable us to expand our reach and effectiveness.

Please contact us at info@netimpact.org.

Undergrads networking at the 2009 Net Impact Conference



About Undergraduate Perspectives

Net Impact administered an online survey to 1,650 undergraduates in Spring 2009. 45 different colleges and universities across the U.S. were represented, including schools both outside and within the Net Impact undergrad network. Survey respondents were spread over all four class years. 34% of respondents indicated that they were currently members of a student club or organizations that emphasize corporate responsibility, social entrepreneurship, nonprofit management, international development, or environmental sustainability. 22% of these students are members of a Net Impact undergraduate chapter (approximately 6.4% of total respondents).

For more information or access to the full survey data set, please contact Brenda Kiefer at bkiefer@netimpact.org.

Net Impact thanks PricewaterhouseCoopers for their generous support of our undergraduate work.



About Net Impact

Net Impact is an international nonprofit organization with a mission to inspire, educate, and equip individuals to use the power of business to create a more socially and environmentally sustainable world. Spanning six continents, our membership makes up one of the most influential networks of MBAs, graduate students, undergraduate students, and professionals in existence today. Net Impact members are current and emerging leaders in CSR, social entrepreneurship, nonprofit management, international development, and environmental sustainability. The Net Impact network includes over 250 volunteer-led chapters in cities, colleges, and universities throughout the world—including over 40 undergraduate campuses across the U.S.

To bring a Net Impact undergrad chapter to your school, contact chapters@netimpact.org.

