

Study concludes aerospace industry must evolve new ways to recruit and retain future engineers

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Aerospace companies must consider offering newly recruited workers flexible job assignments and a variety of projects to remain competitive with other scientific fields of employment. This was among the conclusions of the "2009 Survey of Aerospace Student Attitudes" discussed at the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Joint Societies Capitol Hill Reception, April 13, on Capitol Hill.

Presented by Dr. Annalisa Weigel, Charles Stark Draper Career Development Assistant Professor of [Aeronautics](#) and Astronautics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Mass., and chair of the American Institute of Aeronautics and [Astronautics](#) Public Policy Committee's Subcommittee on Workforce and Education, the data were drawn from a survey of 600 [aerospace engineering](#) sophomore and senior undergraduate [students](#) at 23 schools across the country. Among the survey's findings, Dr. Weigel reported:

- Some 93 percent of the students studied first became interested in aerospace in the K-12 years - 35 percent from age 5 to 9, 27 percent from age 10 to 13, and 30 percent from age 14 to 17. Thus, efforts to attract students to engineering must continue at all stages of primary and secondary education; there is no "magic" age group.

- The students selected salary, excitement, location, and work/life balance as the four most important job attributes. While they felt that the aerospace industry compared more favorably on aspects of salary and excitement, they felt it compared less favorably on location and work/life balance.
- Students expect significant mobility, moving jobs and even changing careers as often as every year or two.
- 47 percent of students expect to gain new engineering responsibility every year or less.
- Over 70 percent of students want to work for different companies or organizations over the course of their careers.

Dr. Weigel warned that while 78 percent of respondents indicated a desire to work in the aerospace field after graduation, 56 percent have seriously considered working outside the industry. This may mean the future workforce is vulnerable to recruitment from other fields.

Dr. Weigel told the audience, "These data are indicative of the values and desires of the millennial workforce, those workers born between 1981 and 2000. Their desires - from what they value, to how they expect to work - do not clearly align with the traditional aerospace industry. In order to attract a vibrant future workforce, the aerospace industry will need to change perceptions of what it has to offer. In addition, we saw that experiences at college can have a small negative influence on aerospace students' attitudes about the industry, so there is work to do in the academic higher education arena as well. Balancing the next generation's desires with the demands of the workplace will require commitment from the entire aerospace community, but we believe this survey aids in the important first step of recognizing the gap."

Provided by American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics

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