

# Research Briefs

## KEY FINDINGS

- 88% of program/degree combinations are represented in survey responses.
- 77% of graduates are currently enrolled or plan to enroll in further education.
- 96% of graduates furthering their education state that their preparation at STC was as good or better than their peers'.
- 98% of graduates say that they would attend STC again, if they had to start over.
- 69% are employed in a field directly or somewhat related to their major.
- 97% say that they have good or very good preparation for their jobs.

## IMPLICATIONS

### For Practice:

- Make efforts to increase the response rate.
- Increase alignment of programs with specific careers related to field of study

### For Policy / Procedure:

- Establish the Graduate Follow-Up Survey as an annual effort.

### For Research:

- Consider additional skills/qualities that can be used to measure the preparedness of the graduates for workplace and continued education.
- Look at the differences between graduates of technical and academic programs.



## An Analysis of the Status and Opinions of South Texas College 2008-09 Graduates

### The 2008-09 Graduate Follow-Up Survey

In order to ensure that South Texas College (STC) is producing quality graduates that are able to find employment or successfully continue their educational endeavors once they have graduated, a Graduate Follow-Up Survey was conducted. The information gathered from this study will allow the college to examine how well it is preparing students for life in the workforce or in furthering their education. Findings suggest that overall former STC students have positive feelings about the preparation provided by the college to continue their education or enter the workforce. STC graduates had a high rate of employment and had overall positive attitudes towards the college.

### Background

The Graduate Follow-Up Survey is an attempt by STC to collect graduates' opinions of their college experience and its contribution to their successful employment or continued education. Data from this survey are used to supplement the graduate placement rate information collected by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. This year the survey research methodology was modified from previous years to a telephone survey in attempts to increase the response rate and to gain a broader coverage of graduates' programs.

### Purpose of Study

The graduate follow-up survey was designed to serve two purposes: (1) to obtain information from recent graduates about their status (e.g. employment, salaries) and opinions (e.g. preparedness for their jobs, level of skills), and (2) to create a database of STC employers to whom the graduate employer satisfaction survey could be directed.

### Methodology

Data collection for this survey began in the summer of 2009 by contacting the December graduates. In spring 2010 another round of data collection began in which all 2008-09 graduates were targeted. The results of these efforts yielded a combined total of 868 usable responses (40% response rate of the total 2147 graduates). The responses collected were highly comprehensive across 80 program/degree combinations with 88% represented. The telephone survey contained 14 questions and was administered by Research and Analytical Services and the STC call center. Descriptive statistics (frequencies) were computed and arranged in tables and charts.

Many respondents also provided contact information about their current employers to be used in the administration of the Graduate Employer Satisfaction Survey.

### Research Questions

Some research questions that guided this study were:

- How effective was STC in preparing graduates for employment and/or further education?
- How effective was STC in helping graduates acquire skills necessary for employment?

### Findings

Due to the categorical nature of the data, percent frequency distributions were used to organize the responses to the questions. The positive survey results indicate that STC is succeeding in its mission of providing its graduates with the skills to enhance the quality of their lives.

### Further Education

A total of 60% of the respondents claimed they were either currently enrolled or had been enrolled in a college or university since graduating from STC; another 27% declared that they were not enrolled but were planning on doing so. Out of the 499 respondents who identified which institution they had enrolled in since graduating, 54% were enrolled at the University

Table 1—Further Education of STC Graduates

Have you enrolled at a college/university since graduating from STC?		
	Count	%
Yes, I am currently enrolled in a colleges/univ.	456	52
Yes, but I am not currently enrolled	74	8
No, but plan to.	234	27
No, and don't plan to.	104	13
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>868</b>	<b>100</b>
Names of colleges/univ. STC graduates attended:		
	Count	%
University of Texas - Pan American	267	54
STC	180	36
Other	52	10
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>499</b>	<b>100</b>
At the first school I attended after graduating from STC, I felt:		
	Count	%
better prepared than most of my classmates.	255	54
as prepared as most of my classmates.	191	41
not as prepared as most of my classmates.	18	4
much less prepared	4	1
Unknown	64	N/A
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>532</b>	<b>100</b>
If you could start college over again, would you choose to attend STC?		
	Count	%
Yes	834	98
No	18	2
Unknown	16	N/A
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>868</b>	<b>100</b>

of Texas-Pan American (UTPA), 36% at STC and 10% mentioned other institutions (i.e., Arizona Automotive Institute, Texas A&M Kingsville, University of Texas Brownsville). 54% of these graduates felt that they were better prepared than most of their classmates at the schools they were attending and 41% felt as prepared (See Table 1). Lastly, an overwhelming majority (98%) of respondents said they would choose to attend STC again if they could start college over.

### Employment

A large proportion (72%) of the respondents stated they were currently

Table 2—Employment of STC Graduates

Are you currently employed/self-employed?		
	Count	%
Yes	620	72
No	242	28
Unknown	6	N/A
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>868</b>	<b>100</b>
Have you been employed since graduating from STC?		
	Count	%
Yes	32	14
No	201	87
Unknown	10	N/A
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>100</b>
How is your most recent job related to your major at STC?		
	Count	%
It is/was directly related to my major	327	51
It is/was somewhat related to my major	116	18
It is/was not related to my major	192	30
Unknown	17	N/A
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>652</b>	<b>100</b>
How long did it take you to find a job after graduating from STC?		
	Count	%
I was hired before graduating	384	62
I was hired within three months after graduating	186	30
I was hired 4 to 6 months after graduating	50	8
Unknown	32	N/A
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>652</b>	<b>100</b>

employed. 14% of the respondents who stated they were currently unemployed reported to have been employed at some point since graduating from STC. Of the respondents who either had been or were currently employed, 51% reported holding jobs directly related to their majors and 18% reported holding a job somewhat related to their major. Also worth mentioning is that 62% were employed before finishing their studies at STC; another 30% acquired jobs within three months after graduating (See Table 2).

The salaries of STC graduates are presented in Figure 1 (adjusted to annual if they reported otherwise). Nearly half (49%) of respondents reported earning between \$15001 and \$30000 annually.

Regarding the preparation for their careers, 97% of graduates who had been, or were currently, employed indicated having “Good” or “Very Good” preparation. The responses were also highly positive when asked about their specific skill levels (See Table 3).

### Implications for Further Research and Practice

Graduate Follow-Up Surveys contribute to continuous quality improvement efforts of STC. By means of the analyses of the data collected through these surveys, STC is able to answer, to a certain degree, the question “How well are our graduates are prepared for employment and further education?” Results suggest that STC graduates feel well prepared; a great majority are employed

or furthering their education in pursuit of a more advanced degree. They self-report that the contribution of their STC education has been valuable to their success in their job and further education. However, it would be valuable to explore how STC may shift graduate opinions from “Good” to “Very Good” regarding their job-skill training.

Table 3—Training and Skills of STC Graduates

	Very Good	Good	Poor	Very Poor
How well did STC train you for your most recent job?	52%	45%	2%	1%
Managerial skills	35%	63%	2%	0%
Critical thinking skills	51%	48%	1%	0%
Leadership skills	44%	54%	2%	0%
Communication skills	55%	44%	1%	0%
Technological skills	42%	55%	3%	0%
Problem solving skills	51%	48%	1%	0%

In order to continually assess the impact STC is having on the lives of its graduates, the Graduate Follow-Up Survey will be administered annually. This action will allow a trend analysis. Additionally, further analyses will be conducted to compare graduates from technical and academic programs.

Typical to any survey research, every effort will be undertaken to increase the response rate. Also, STC would be well served to partner more with employers to expose students to available jobs related to their majors; this would also allow STC to gain feedback in updating the curriculum to better align programs of study to related jobs.

Annual Salaries Reported by STC Graduates (N=551)

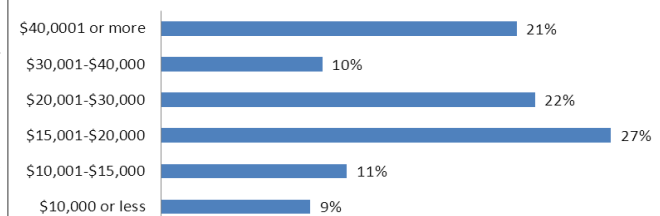


Figure 1—Most Recent Salaries of STC Graduates