

# Research Briefs

## KEY FINDINGS

- 83% of program/degree combinations are represented in survey responses.
- 57% of STC graduates had enrolled at another institution of higher education since graduating from STC.
- 97% 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:

- Administer the Graduate Follow-Up Survey annually

### For Research:

- Consider additional skills/qualities that can be used to measure the preparedness of the graduates for workplace and continued education.
- Conduct a longitudinal analysis to assess any changes in survey responses.



## An Analysis of the Status and Opinions of South Texas College 2009-10 Graduates

### The 2009-10 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 after graduating, STC conducts an annual Graduate Follow-Up Survey. These surveys are designed to gather information on how well the college is preparing students for life in the workforce or in furthering their education. For the 2009-10 academic year, 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 their education at STC.

### 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 (THECB). This survey research methodology utilized telephone and email surveys 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 supplement data on graduate placement rates from the THECB.

### Methodology

Data collection for this survey began in the summer of 2011 by contacting graduates from the 2010 academic year. The results of these efforts yielded a combined total of 973 usable responses (35% response rate of the total 2792 graduates). The responses collected were highly comprehensive across xx program/degree combinations with 83% represented. The telephone survey contained 17 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.

### 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 57% of the respondents claimed they had enrolled in another institution since graduating from STC. Out of the 546 respondents who identified which institutions (many students cited multiple institutions) they had enrolled in since graduating, 65% had enrolled at the University of Texas-Pan American (UTPA), 26% at STC, 5% University of Texas of Brownsville, and 20% mentioned other institutions (i.e., UTB, TAMUK, UT, A&M). 55% of these graduates felt that they were better prepared than most of their classmates at the schools they were attending and 42% felt as prepared (See Table 1). Lastly,

| Table 1 - Further Education of STC Graduates                                  |       |     |     |
|---|-------|-----|-----|
| <b>Have you enrolled at a college/university since graduating from STC?</b>   |       |     |     |
|   | Count | %   |     |
| Yes   | 560   | 57  |     |
| No  | 416   | 43  |     |
| TOTAL   |       | 976 | 100 |
| <b>Names of colleges/univ. STC graduates attended (*N=541)</b>                |       |     |     |
| University of Texas - Pan American  | 353   | 65  |     |
| STC   | 138   | 26  |     |
| University of Texas of Brownsville/Texas Southmost College                    | 25    | 5   |     |
| Other   | 111   | 21  |     |
| <b>At the first school I attended after graduating from STC, I felt</b>       |       |     |     |
|   | Count | %   |     |
| better prepared than most of my classmates.                                   | 301   | 55  |     |
| as prepared as most of my classmates.   | 228   | 42  |     |
| not as prepared as most of my classmates.                                     | 16    | 3   |     |
| much less prepared  | 1     | 0   |     |
| Unknown   | 14    | N/A |     |
| TOTAL   |       | 546 | 100 |
| <b>If you could start college over again, would you choose to attend STC?</b> |       |     |     |
| Yes   | 933   | 96  |     |
| No  | 40    | 4   |     |
| Unknown   | 3     | N/A |     |
| TOTAL   |       | 973 | 100 |

months after graduating (See Table 2). The salaries of STC graduates are presented in Figure 1 (adjusted to annual if they reported otherwise). The majority of respondents (64%) reported earning more than \$20,001 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).

an overwhelming majority (96%) of respondents said they would choose to attend STC again if they could start college over.

*Employment*

A large proportion (63%) of the respondents stated they had been employed since graduating from STC. Of these graduates 58% reported holding jobs directly related to their majors and 17% reported holding a job somewhat related to their major. Also worth mentioning is that 50% were employed before finishing their studies at STC; another 38% acquired jobs within three

**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 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.

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.

This is the third consecutive year the Graduate Follow-Up Survey has been

Table 3 - Training and Skills of STC Graduates (\*N=598)

|  | Very Good | Good | Poor | Very Poor |
|--|-----------|------|------|-----------|
| How well did STC train you for your most recent job? | 59%       | 38%  | 2%   | 1%        |
| Managerial skills                                    | 33%       | 63%  | 3%   | 1%        |
| Critical thinking skills                             | 54%       | 45%  | 1%   | 0%        |
| Leadership skills                                    | 49%       | 49%  | 2%   | 0%        |
| Communication skills                                 | 54%       | 45%  | 1%   | 0%        |
| Technological skills                                 | 43%       | 53%  | 3%   | 1%        |
| Problem solving skills                               | 55%       | 44%  | 1%   | 1%        |

conducted. Longitudinal analysis will be conducted to assess any changes that may have taken place over the three year period in graduates’ attitudes, perceptions, employment or education.

| Table 2 - Employment of STC Graduates                                   |       |     |     |
|---|-------|-----|-----|
| <b>Are you currently employed/self-employed?</b>                        |       |     |     |
|   | Count | %   |     |
| Yes   | 614   | 63  |     |
| No  | 359   | 37  |     |
| Unknown   | 3     | N/A |     |
| TOTAL   |       | 973 | 100 |
| <b>How is your most recent job related to your major at STC</b>         |       |     |     |
| It is/was directly related to my major                                  | 355   | 58  |     |
| It is/was somewhat related to my major                                  | 106   | 17  |     |
| It is/was not related to my major                                       | 148   | 24  |     |
| Unknown   | 5     | N/A |     |
| TOTAL   |       | 609 | 100 |
| <b>How long did it take you to find a job after graduating from STC</b> |       |     |     |
| I was hired before graduating   | 299   | 50  |     |
| I was hired within three months after                                   | 227   | 38  |     |
| I was hired 4 to 6 months after   | 78    | 13  |     |
| Unknown   | 10    | N/A |     |
| TOTAL   |       | 604 | 100 |

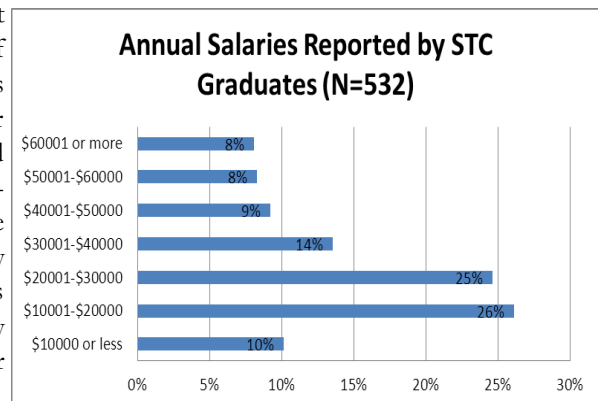


Figure 1—Salaries of STC Graduates