

Research Briefs

KEY FINDINGS

- Nearly 80% of program/degree combinations are represented in survey responses.
- 84% of graduates and 96% of transfer-track 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.
- 74% are employed in 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
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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 Graduates

The 2008 Graduate Follow-Up Survey

In order to insure 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 approximately six months after the December 2008 graduation. 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 pursuit of further 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 random stratified sample telephone survey to make the data collection process shorter, encourage STC graduates to provide information for the College to use to improve its programs and services, and to gain broader coverage of the 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

376 of 704 December 2008 graduates were randomly sampled within strata by degree and program type. The survey contains a total of 14 questions. The telephone interviews administered by the Research and Analytical Services (RAS) staff resulted in 184 usable responses (49% response rate). The responses collected were highly comprehensive across 71 program/degree combinations with nearly 80% represented. Descriptive statistics (frequencies) were computed and arranged in tables and charts. Many graduates 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 56% of the respondents claimed they were either currently enrolled or had been enrolled in a college or university since graduating from STC; another 28% declared that they were not enrolled but were planning on doing so. In the same token, over 85% of the respondents from the two Associate of Art degrees (Business Administration and Interdisciplinary

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 one or more colleges/univ.	83	45	
Yes, but I am not currently enrolled in any college/univ.	21	11	
No, but plan to.	51	28	
No, and don't plan to.	29	16	
TOTAL	184	100	
Names of colleges/univ. STC graduates attended:			
University of Texas - Pan American	49	48	
South Texas College	46	45	
Other	7	7	
Unknown	2	NA	
TOTAL	104	100	
At the first school I attended after graduating from STC, I felt			
better prepared than most of my classmates.	45	50	
as prepared as most of my classmates.	41	46	
not as prepared as most of my classmates.	2	2	
Other	2	2	
Unknown	14	NA	
TOTAL	104	100	
If you could start college over again, would you choose to attend STC?			
Yes	168	98	
No	4	2	
Unknown	12	NA	
TOTAL	184	100	

Studies), designed for those students who plan to transfer credits towards earning a Baccalaureate Degree, responded that they were enrolled in one or more college or university and another 11% planned to. Out of the 102 respondents who identified where they had been enrolled in a college/ university since graduating from STC, 48% were enrolled at the University of Texas-Pan American (UTPA), 45% at STC, and 7% mentioned other institutions (e.g. Texas A&M Kingsville, UT Brownsville, Texas A&M Corpus Christi, and Arizona Automotive Institute). 50% of these graduates felt that they were better prepared than most of their classmates at the schools they were attending and 46% felt as prepared (See Table 1). What is also overwhelmingly pleasing is that, when asked if they would choose to attend STC if they could start college over, 98% of the graduates responded “Yes”.

Table 2—Employment of STC Graduates

Are you currently employed/self-employed?			
	Count	%	
Yes	132	73	
No	49	27	
Unknown	3	NA	
TOTAL	184	100	
How was your most recent job related to your major at STC?			
Directly related	74	57	
Somewhat related	18	14	
Not related	37	29	
Unknown	3	NA	
TOTAL	132	100	
How long did it take you to find a job after graduating from STC?			
I was hired before graduating.	71	56	
I was hired within 3 months after graduating.	50	39	
I was hired within 4 to 6 months after graduating.	6	5	
Unknown	5	NA	
TOTAL	132	100	

Employment

A large proportion (73%) of the respondents stated that they were employed. Furthermore, 57% of those were holding jobs directly related to their majors at STC and 14% somewhat related. Also worthwhile to mention is that 56% were employed before finishing their studies at STC; another 39% 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). Regarding how well STC prepared them for their careers, 97% of graduates who were employed indicated having “Good” or “Very Good” preparation. Similarly, the responses were highly positive when they were asked about their specific skill levels (See Table 3). To sum it up, 87% of these graduates are either employed or pursuing further education. Only 3% have not found a job since graduating from STC and 1% have been laid off (See Table 4).

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 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 to their critical job skills is and has been valuable.

Table 3—Training and Skills of STC Graduates

	Very Good	Good	Poor
How well did STC train you for your most recent job?	57%	40%	2%
Managerial skills	32%	67%	1%
Critical thinking skills	56%	44%	0%
Leadership skills	47%	52%	1%
Communication skills	55%	43%	2%
Technological skills	43%	55%	2%
Problem solving skills	55%	44%	1%

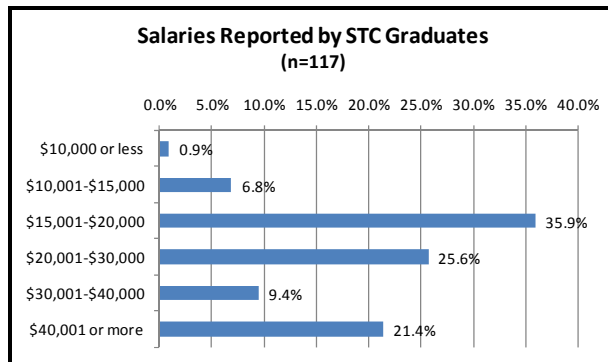


Figure 1—Most Recent Salaries of STC Graduates

Since STC wishes to continue having a significant effect in its graduates’ lives, partly measured by their successful employment and continued education, 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 and also differences between graduate award types. Finally, typical to any survey research, every effort will be undertaken to increase the response rate. The College would be well served also to partner more with employers to expose students to available jobs directly related to the fields of study while also providing feedback for alignment and updating of the curriculum.

Table 4—General Status of STC Graduates

	Count	%
Employed	132	72
Unemployed	49	27
Not looking because continuing education	28	15
Homemaker	4	2
Unemployed for health/personal reasons	1	1
Laid-off	1	1
Have not found a job since graduating from STC	5	3
Other	2	1
Unknown	8	4
Unknown	3	2
TOTAL	184	100