



Highlights of the Alberta Graduate Outcome Survey, Class of 2007-2008

Highlights Report

Alberta Advanced Education and Technology

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Key Highlights

Introduction

As part of its on-going research initiatives, Alberta Advanced Education and Technology (AET) contracted Harris/Decima to conduct a satisfaction and outcomes research study with graduates of Alberta's post-secondary education Institutions. This survey investigates graduates' satisfaction with their post-secondary educational experience and their employment outcomes approximately two years after graduation. This research will inform AET and support institutional planning.

A total of 26 public post-secondary Institutions participated in this research, yielding a total of 9,887 completed surveys with graduates (29% completion rate). A total of 8,407 surveys were completed by telephone and 1,480 were completed online. Programs include credit & non-credit programs that are eligible for financial assistance.

As the methodology for this survey was a census-approach (with every graduate being given the opportunity to complete the survey) and therefore a non-probability sample (as opposed to a random sample), a margin of error cannot be indicated. This is in accordance with the Market Research Intelligence Association (MRIA) Standards, of which Harris/Decima is a member and by which it adheres (<http://www.mria-arim.ca/STANDARDS/CODE2007.asp>).

Should this have been a probability sample, the margin of error would have been +/- 0.84%, nineteen times out of 20.

For a complete discussion on the methodology, please refer to the Technical Report.

Section A: Demographics

The demographic profile of the respondents of this survey was as follows:

- Virtually all (97%) graduates had completed high school before entering their post-secondary studies.
- A majority of graduates from Alberta post-secondary programs also went to high school in the province.
 - Two thirds (67%) of graduates last attended high school in Alberta, including four in ten in urban Alberta and a quarter elsewhere in the province. A quarter (23%) last attended high school in another province or territory in Canada and one in ten (10%) outside of the country.
- Almost half of graduates (45%) indicated that at least one of their parents completed a Bachelor degree or more. An additional one in four (25%) said that their parents had completed a College or Post-secondary degree and a quarter a High School degree.
 - Less than one in ten (8%) graduates indicated that their parents had not obtained a High School degree.

- The cohort consisted of a higher proportion of female graduates (59%) from Alberta institutions than male graduates (41%).
- The average age of graduates from the Class of 2007-2008 at the time of this study was 30 years old.
- Overall, close to three quarters (72%) of graduates were single when they started their program, a quarter (25%) was married or living with a partner and less than one in twenty (3%) were divorced, separated or widowed.
- One in five graduates (20%) was responsible for at least one dependent at the start of their program.
- Overall, 3% of graduates from Alberta post-secondary institutions self-identified as Aboriginal people.
 - Among non-Aboriginal graduates, 16% considered themselves a member of a visible minority.
- Two percent of graduates from Alberta post-secondary institutions had a disability. The most common disabilities included learning disabilities, more specifically, Attention Deficit Disorders or Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorders and general physical disabilities.

Section B: Satisfaction

Graduates continue to graduate with high levels of satisfaction with their overall educational experience, the quality of their programs and the teaching provided.

- Most graduates felt their institution offered them an opportunity to improve themselves (84% rated a 4/5 or 5/5) and also most said that it provided them with a desire to continue learning more and allowed them to acquire knowledge of a particular field of study (82%).
 - However, graduates are somewhat less positive in their institution in terms of providing students with skills needed for a particular job (67%).
- Reflecting on their educational experience, graduates felt that their institution mainly helped them learn and work independently (77% rated it either a 4/5 or 5/5).
 - Graduates were much less likely to mention they had developed mathematical skills (39%) and awareness of political and social issues (40%) through their institution.
- The vast majority of graduates were satisfied with the overall quality of their educational experience (91%), including almost half (46%) who indicated they were *very satisfied*.
- As well, the majority of graduates were satisfied with the overall quality of their program (89%).
- Nine in ten (89%) graduates indicated that they were satisfied with the quality of teaching in their program.

- The majority of graduates would recommend both the institution they attended and the program they completed (94% and 88% respectively).
- The large majority (87%) of graduates believed that the financial investment in their post-secondary studies was worth it for the benefits gained.
 - The data suggests that the perceived financial investment of their education increases with income.
- A small group of graduates (6%) participated in a study abroad program outside of Canada.
 - Graduates who participated in a study abroad program went to a variety of countries. However, the most common ones were Germany, Mexico, the United States and France.
 - The majority of study abroad programs were offered in English (62% all in English and an additional 19% primarily in English).
 - Virtually all (96%) study abroad participants were satisfied with their educational experience, including 69% who were *very* satisfied.

Section C: Financing

Many graduates relied on financial aid such as student loans (from government and non-government sources), bursaries, grants and scholarships to subsidize their education. While the percentage of students who received loans has declined somewhat from the previous wave of research, the amount borrowed has risen.

- Across institutions, programs and fields of study, a majority of graduates (72%) worked while taking classes.
- More than half (57%) of all graduates received some kind of loan throughout their study period
 - Four in ten did not take out any loans
- Four in ten graduates indicated they received government student loans.
 - The average loan amount from government sources for the class of 2007-08 was \$18,737.
- Three in ten graduates tapped into other sources of financing such as bank loans, credit lines, credit cards or loans from other sources.
 - Non-government loans amounted to an average of \$10,885.
- While four in ten did not have any loans, 13% had both government and non-government loans.
 - When receiving one type of loan over the other, students more often received government loans: 27% received these types of loans, while 17% fewer received only non-government student loans.

- The median total debt was \$18,830, with three in ten having debts of less than \$5,000 and the same proportion having debts of more than \$25,000.
- Besides loans, two in three students (68%) financed (at least part of) their studies through scholarships, grants or bursaries.
 - Close to seven in ten (68%) received some type of financial assistance that was not a loan.
 - The average amount received via scholarships, grants, or bursaries was \$8,794.

Section D: Transitions

- A majority of students transitioned directly into a post-secondary institution after high school.
 - Half of all graduates (52%) entered their program straight out of high school, while another one in five (18%) took a year off in between. Almost one in ten waited two years (9%) or between three and five years (8%) before attending a post-secondary institution. The remainder (12%) entered their program more than five years after high school.
 - Online resources and people close to the graduates were seen as the most valuable sources of information consulted in helping them choose their program and institution.
 - Among those who used them, individual institution websites were seen as the most valuable of the information sources tested (mean score of 3.7 out of 5).
 - Four of the sources tested were experienced as not useful by about half of those who consulted them: people at work (48% not useful, mean of 2.6), career counselors (52%; 2.5), student recruiters or reps from the post-secondary institutions (54%; 2.4) and the ALIS website (58%; 2.3).
- Close to one half (47%) of graduates had already completed post-secondary courses prior to enrolling in their most recent program.
- Less than one in ten (7%) graduates applied for Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) when enrolling in their program.
- It appears that a majority of students were successful in their PLAR application. Four in five who applied received some credits.
 - One in four (25%) received credits for one course, 44% for two to four courses, 18% for five to ten courses, and 13% for eleven or more courses.
- Overall, seven in ten graduates (71%) did not take any courses either online or via distance education. Three percent took half of their courses via alternative learning channels, while 12% did so for either more than half (4%) or all of their courses (8%).

- Not all graduates went straight into the work force, with 28% re-enrolled in an educational program following graduation. A majority (65%) of this group of current students are in school full-time.
- A majority of graduates (73%), when interviewed, stayed in the same city or town where they studied. Among those who relocated, any graduates went home, or where they could find employment.

Section E: Outcomes

- The majority of graduates are currently employed with high average incomes 2 years after graduation.
- Two in three graduates (63%) said that completion of a specific degree was their primary goal, which in turn was achieved by almost everyone.
 - The second most commonly set primary goal was to successfully find employment after graduation (13%). While this was still attained by the vast majority of this group, one in five did not feel they achieved this goal.
 - Among the group who did not achieve their goal, three in ten (31%) said they did not achieve it because they changed programs, career plans, or simply changed goals once they were in the program of choice.
 - Among those who set a goal related to employment which was not attained, lack of employment in the field was often mentioned as the reason.
- The vast majority of graduates were employed at the time of the study.
 - 85% of graduates were employed
- Most graduates in the 2007-2008 cohort obtained their current, main job within the first year after graduation (78% at current job for at least one year).
- Almost half worked in either one of three sectors: health care and social assistance (21%), education services (17%), or mining, oil and gas (9%).
- The average salary graduates earned in their main job was \$56,564.
- Most jobs held by graduates were either somewhat or very related to their program.
 - A majority said that their main job tasks were closely related to the general skills and abilities learned in their program (63%), with another quarter saying they were somewhat related. Subject-area knowledge acquired in school was also seen as quite applicable to their jobs (56% very related).
- While most primary jobs were related to the degree with which students graduated, this was not true of other jobs graduates held at the time they were surveyed.
- The vast majority of graduates held jobs for which completion of post-secondary studies were required.

- While one in five (18%) held a job that required a high school diploma, half (48%) were in jobs that required a degree, either at the undergraduate level (36%), graduate level (9%) or professional level (3%).
- More than six in ten graduates (62%) felt qualified for their job.
 - However, just over one third (36%) said they were over-qualified for the job they held at this point in time, two years after graduating. Only a handful said they were under-qualified (2%).
- Overall, nine in ten graduates (90%) from the class of 2007-2008 was quite satisfied with their jobs, including 41% who were very satisfied.
 - Only one in ten were dissatisfied, with two percent claiming to be very dissatisfied.
- More than anything, income was a good indicator of job satisfaction.

Section F: Non-Credit Programs

Seventy-five graduates of non-credit programs participated in the study.

- Roughly one-half of graduates from non-credit programs were female and one-half were male (49% and 51% respectively).
 - Graduates from parchment programs were more likely to be female by a 1.5 to 1 ratio.
- Graduates from non-credit programs were slightly older than those from parchment programs.
 - Graduates from a non-credit program were, on average, 32.1 years old, while graduates from a parchment program were, on average, 29.7 years old.
- One-half of graduates from non-credit programs were single while one-half were married or living with a partner.
 - In comparison, about three-quarters of graduates (72%) from parchment programs were single while most of the remainder were married or living with a partner.
- Overall, graduates from non-credit programs had the same goals as graduates from parchment programs upon entering their institution.
 - The large majority of graduates, whether in non-credit (86%) or parchment programs (92%) said they achieved the goals set for themselves at the start of their program.
- As with graduates from parchment programs, graduates from non-credit programs were satisfied with the quality of teaching in their program (86%), the overall quality of their program (86%) and the overall educational experience (89%).
- Regardless of the type of program graduates were enrolled in, the majority agreed that the benefits of their post-secondary education outweighed the financial costs.

- Two-thirds of graduates from non-credit programs had to work while taking classes, a similar proportion to that reported by graduates from parchment programs (67% and 72% respectively).
- Two years after graduation, close to nine-in-ten (88%) graduates from non-credit programs were employed, a proportion comparable to graduates from parchment programs (85%).
- Graduates from non-credit programs were more likely than graduates from parchment programs to hold a job that was related to the program from which they graduated (66% versus 56%).
- Roughly three-quarters (72%) of graduates from non-credit programs felt *qualified* for their job while one-quarter (25%) felt *over-qualified*.
 - In comparison, a higher proportion of graduates from parchment programs felt *over-qualified* (36%).

Section G: Historic

Every two years, since 2004, Alberta Advanced Education and Technology has been commissioning this survey to determine the outcomes of Alberta post-secondary institutions' graduates. Some highlights from the tracking figures include:

- Employment rates have been relatively consistent since 2004, in the high-nineties, although the rate dropped from 97% to 95% since the last survey cycle.
- While the proportion of graduates who were unemployed increased slightly, there was a larger increase in those who had returned to school to become a student.
- The median salary for 2007 – 2008 graduates is \$51,000. This is an increase from the median reported in 2005 – 2006 of \$48,017 when adjusted by the Consumer Price Index (CPI).
- While total loan incidence has been declining steadily though each of the four waves of research, it is government sponsored loans that were declining in number, while non-government loans remain relatively constant.
- Median debt figures appeared to be steadily declining in terms of total loans.
 - Median amounts of government-sponsored loans remained relatively constant, while debt in non-government financing has declined.