



**Alberta Graduate Outcomes Survey,
Class of 2007-2008: Private Institution
Graduates**

Final Report

Alberta Advanced Education and Technology

October 25, 2010

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Executive Summary

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 from four of Alberta's private post-secondary education institutions. This study investigates graduates' satisfaction with their post-secondary educational experience and their employment outcomes approximately two years after graduation. It is expected that results from this research will inform AET and help with future institutional planning.

A total of 124 surveys were completed with students from four private institutions, as follows: Academy of Learning, Columbia College, Marvel Colleges, and Reeves Colleges. The final sample of 124 represents a completion rate of 15%, based on the number of sample records obtained from the institutions. Furthermore, there was an overall response rate of 20%.

This summary presents the findings from the research conducted with graduates from the four private institutions in this pilot project.

Section A: Demographics

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

- Most graduates from private institutions completed grade 12 prior to embarking on their post-secondary education.
- Half of this cohort of graduates came from households where at least one parent had completed some form of post-secondary education, either college or university.
- Virtually all graduates from private institutions were women, and were on average 31.5 years old.
- About 4% of the graduates from private institutions were Aboriginal or self-identified as a visible minority. Furthermore, few claimed to have a disability.

Section B: Transitions

- Just over half of graduates waited at least three years between high school graduation and beginning their post-secondary studies. Less than one in five continued on to post-secondary education immediately following the award of their high school diploma.
- Graduates found a variety of resources to be helpful in choosing an institution or program for their post-secondary education, chiefly the institution websites and teachers. On the other end of the spectrum, career fairs and institutional calendars (print and online) were somewhat less useful.
- One in four took some proportion of their coursework online or through distance education.

Section C: Satisfaction

The four private institutions included in this study appear to be successful at helping graduates become better individuals and acquire a strong set of skills and abilities that will help them, in turn, be successful in their lives and careers.

- Graduates from these four private institutions were most likely to want employment at the outset of their studies or the completion of a specific degree. Upon completion, almost nine in ten believed they achieved their goal.
- Graduates saw a variety of benefits provided by their program. Primarily, self-improvement as well as acquiring specific skills for a particular job or degree were seen as benefits.
- There was a sense among graduates that their institution had helped them develop skills and knowledge to work independently and work well with others. Graduates cited a number of other skills acquired.
- There was a very high degree of satisfaction among graduates with the quality of their educational experience, their program, as well as the teachers. Consequently, almost eight in ten would recommend their program as well as the institution.
- Very few graduates from private institutions studied abroad over the course of their post-secondary education.

Section D: Financing

- Half of graduates from the four private institutions included in this research worked while completing their post-secondary education. Meanwhile, a similar proportion of graduates secured government-sponsored loans to finance their education. A much smaller proportion obtained non-government sponsored loans. Few obtained both government and non-government sponsored loans. A plurality of graduates did not obtain any type of loan to finance their education.
- On average, graduates carried a debt-load of \$10,558 at graduation. The debt-load for government-sponsored loans averaged \$8,371.
- Four in ten (39%) graduates also obtained scholarships or bursaries through the course of their education.

Section E: Outcomes

- A large majority of graduates from the four private institutions included in this pilot were employed and three in four held one paying job at the time of surveying.
- Eight in ten had held their current position for at least one year. Graduates were most likely to be employed in the health and social assistance field.
- Graduates from private institutions reported an average income of \$40,699.
- Graduates were most likely to state that a non-university degree was required for their current position. Furthermore, six in ten felt that they were qualified for their current job. Few considered themselves under-qualified.
- There was a sense among half of graduates from the four private institutions that the education and skills acquired were very relevant to their current job

Conclusions and Recommendations

This year represents the first time that the Ministry has surveyed graduates from private vocational institutions offering licensed programs in its Graduate Outcomes Survey. Initiated as a pilot project, involving four private vocational training providers, the purpose of this project was to inform the development of future surveys examining graduates' satisfaction with their employment outcomes approximately two years after graduation. The survey provides a good opportunity to gain a greater understanding of the private vocational training system in Alberta.

Although the data collected and analyzed cannot be generalized to the private vocational training system, it appears that a number of the questions may be applicable and suitable to graduates from this sector. It is likely, however, given the uniqueness of this sector that a number of questions are potentially not applicable and a refinement and focus of the survey for subsequent years will be required. It is also important to capture the lessons learned by the four participating institutions in terms of their roles and responsibilities in the survey, in order to inform future developments.

Introduction

Project Background

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 from four of Alberta's private post-secondary education institutions. This study investigates graduates' satisfaction with their post-secondary educational experience and their employment outcomes approximately two years after graduation. It is expected that results from this research will inform AET and help with institutional planning.

For the Class of 2007-08, a pilot version of this research was conducted with **private institutions** in the province, as follows:

Academy of Learning
Columbia College
Marvel Colleges
Reeves Colleges

Marvel Colleges

Marvel Colleges were first established in Edmonton and Calgary in 1925, and has operated under the same ownership group since 1975. Marvel College has since expanded its operations throughout Western Canada, with its corporate office located in Edmonton. The mission of Marvel College is to inspire passion for the beauty industry, nurture creativity and cultivate financially rewarding careers. The licensed programs offered at all Marvel Colleges include esthetics, hairstyling and nail technician.

Academy of Learning

Academy of Learning has several institutions located throughout Alberta, including multiple campuses in both Calgary and Edmonton. Academy of Learning offers students a wide variety of career paths to study and pursue, a hands-on approach to career training, self-paced learning, flexible scheduling, and an environment conducive to learning. Career-specific programs such as office administration, health care and web design give students the skills needed to reach their career goals.

Reeves Colleges

Reeves Colleges have been providing career related training for 50 years and currently operates out of five locations in Alberta. The programs offered at Reeves Colleges have been developed based on direct input from professionals in fields such as business, health care, hospitality, law, and art/design, ensuring that students will be able to satisfy current industry demands upon graduation. Programs at Reeves Colleges also provide students with practicum opportunities, allowing them to gain hands-on experience in their field of study.

Columbia College

Established in 1986 in Calgary, Columbia College offers many flexible and responsive programs designed to meet the needs of learners and industries such as business, health care and information technology. Columbia College is the first post-secondary institution in Alberta to be certified by the International Organization for Standardization for the quality of its operating practices. The mission of Columbia College is to provide high quality knowledge and skills and to assist students in achieving their career goals in an accelerated fashion.

Data Collection Methodology

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 from four of Alberta's private post-secondary education institutions. This study investigates graduates' satisfaction with their post-secondary educational experience and their employment outcomes approximately two years after graduation. It is expected that results from this research will inform AET and help with future institutional planning.

A total of 124 surveys were completed with students from four private institutions, as follows: Academy of Learning, Columbia College, Marvel Colleges, and Reeves Colleges. The final sample of 124 represents a completion rate of 15%, based on the number of sample records obtained from the institutions. Furthermore, there was an overall response rate of 20%.

Please refer to Appendix A: Data Collection Methodology for a detailed description of the methodology used to complete this research.

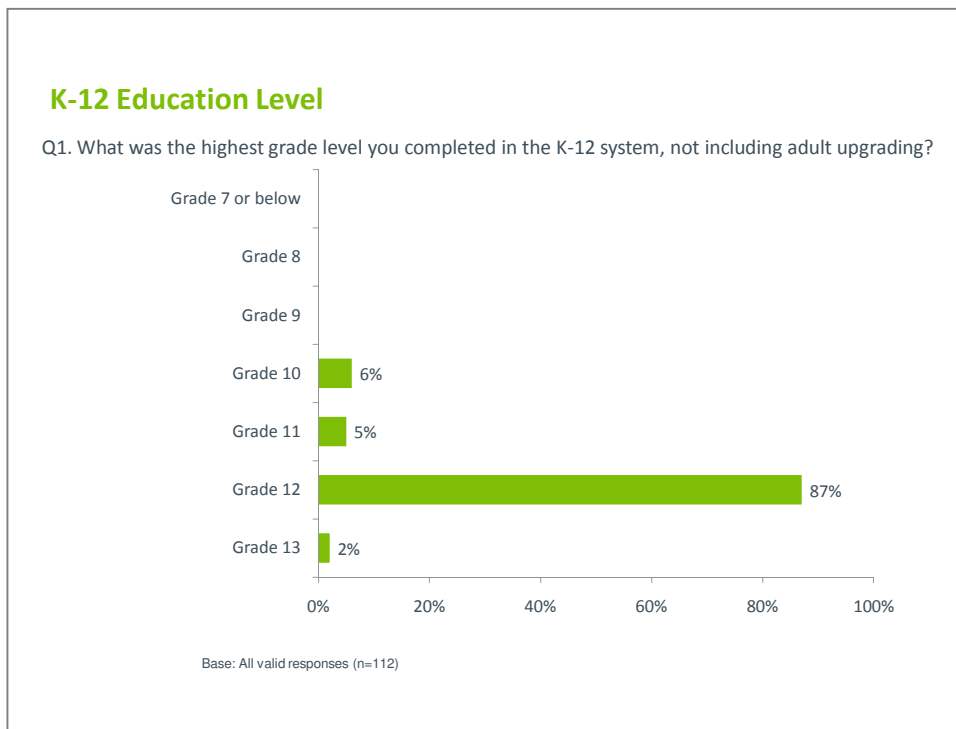
Section A: Demographics

This first section will provide a picture of the 2007-2008 graduates from the four private institutions included in this research in terms of demographics, including their and their parents’ education levels, gender, age, family composition, first-nation status, visible minority status and disability status.

Education

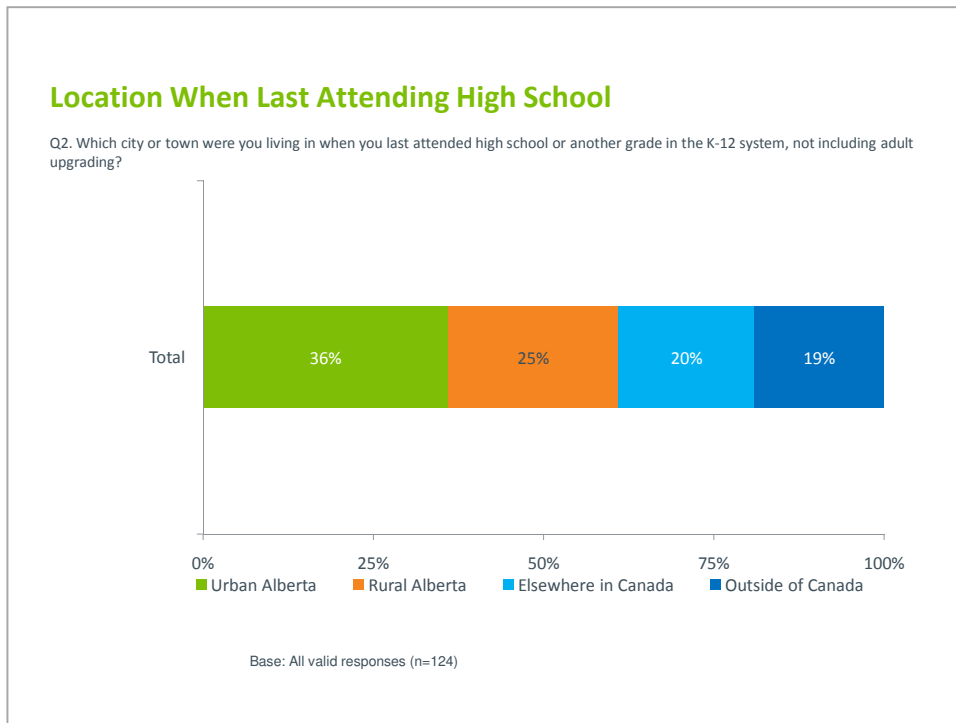
Highest Grade Completed in High School

The vast majority of graduates (87%) completed grade 12 in high school, with an additional 2% completing grade 13. One in ten private institution graduates completed either grade 10 (6%) or grade 11 (5%) in high school.



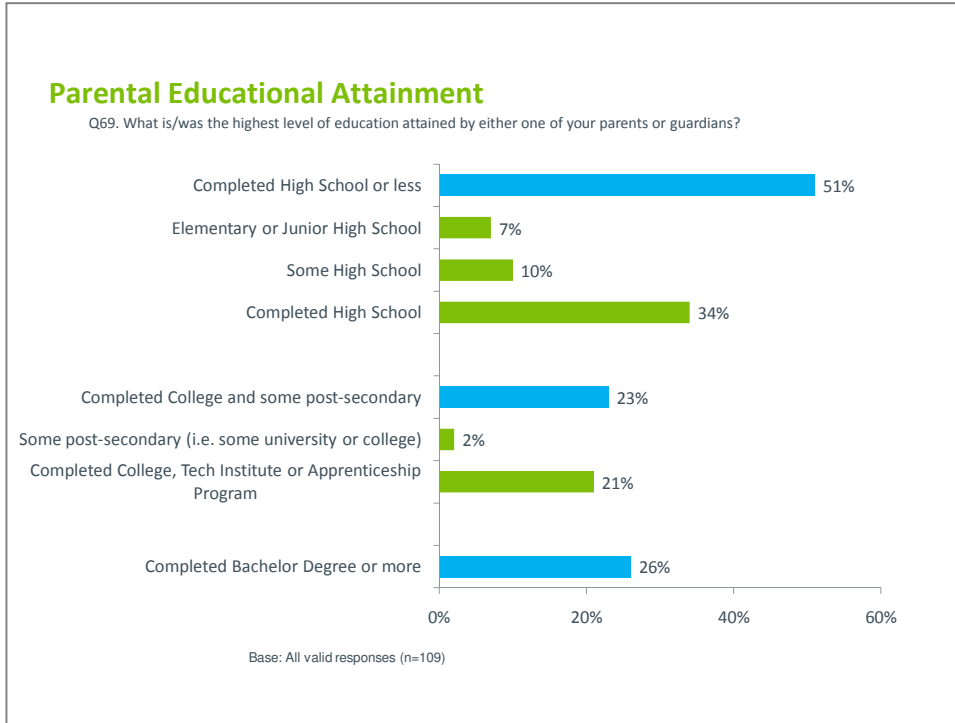
Location When Last Attending High School

Six in ten graduates last attended high school within Alberta: 36% in urban Alberta and 25% in rural Alberta. Meanwhile, similar proportions of graduates went to high school elsewhere in Canada (20%) or outside of the country (19%).



Parental Educational Attainment

While one half (51%) of private institution graduates’ parents had completed high school or less, similar proportions had taken at least some post-secondary education or had completed college (23%) or obtained a Bachelor degree or more (26%).

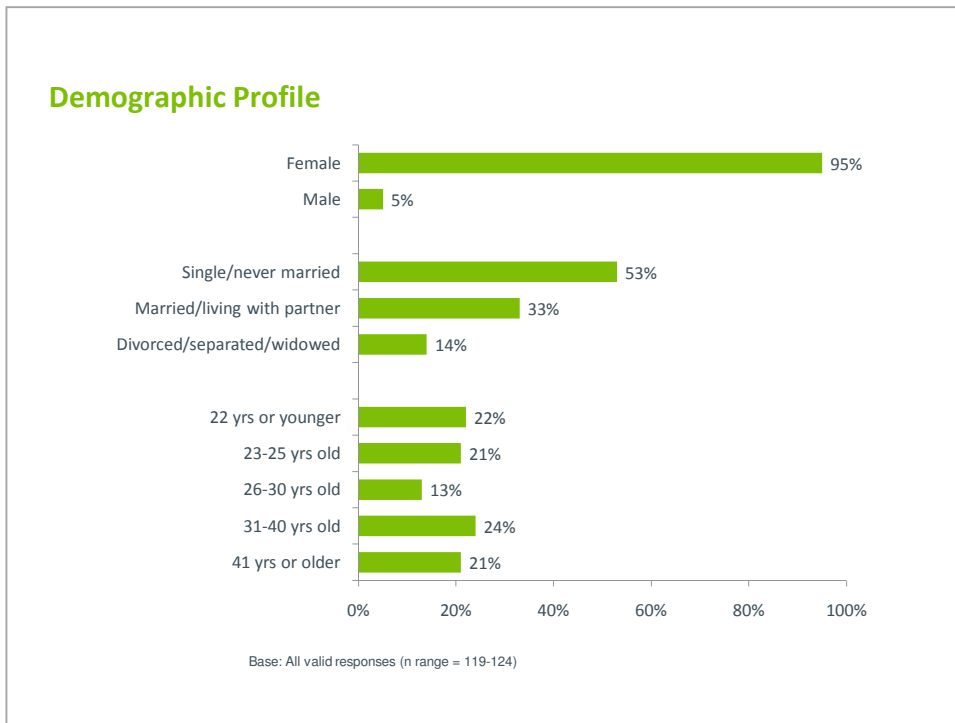


Gender, Age and Marital Status

Overall, the large majority of the Class of 2007-2008 was women (95%).

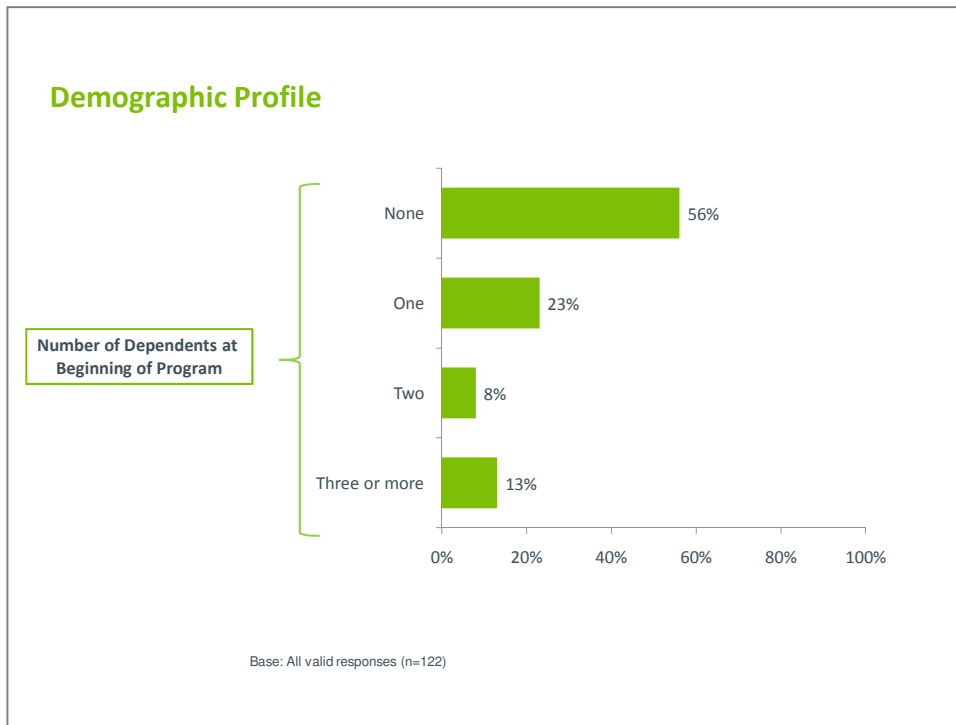
The average age for private institution graduates was 31.5 years. About one in five graduates were 22 years of age or younger (22%) or between 23 and 25 years of age (21%). On the other end of the spectrum, similar proportions of graduates were between 31 and 40 years of age (24%) or older than 40 years (21%). Graduates were least likely to be between 26 and 30 years of age (13%).

A majority of private institution graduates were single or never married (53%) whereas one in three graduates were married or living with a partner at the time of graduation (33%). Graduates were least likely to be divorced, separated, or widowed (14%).



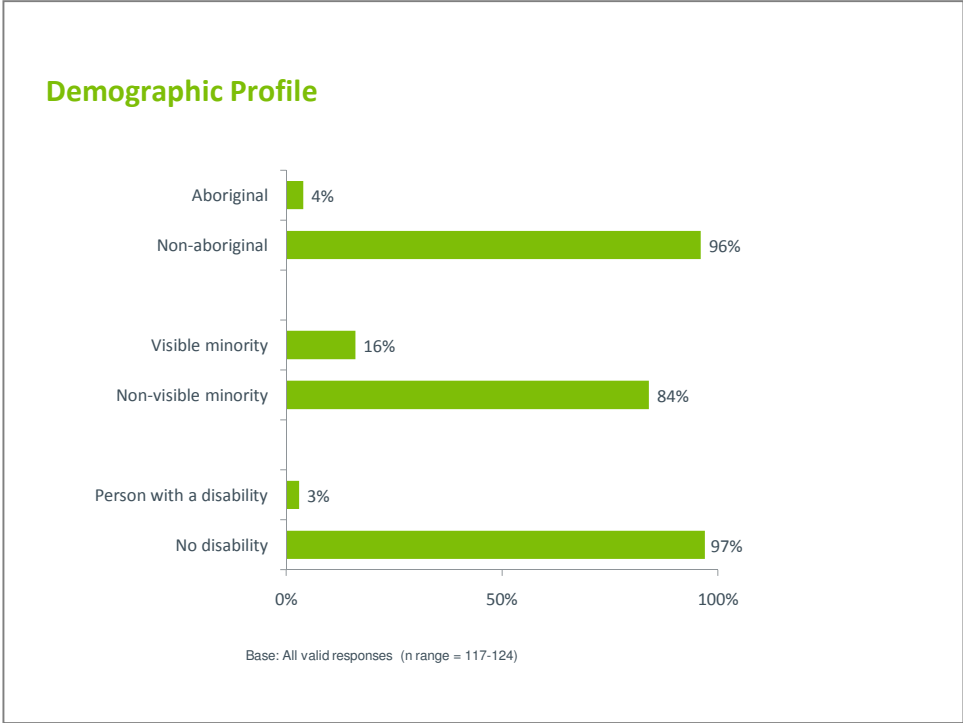
Dependents

Equal proportions of graduates were with or without dependents. Fully one half (56%) did not have any dependants. Meanwhile, one in four (23%) had one dependent, 8% had two dependents, and 13% had three or more dependents at the beginning of their program.



Aboriginal Status, Visible Minority Status and Disability Status

Among private institution graduates, 4% described themselves as being Aboriginal. Almost one in ten identified themselves as a visible minority (16%) and 3% were a person with a disability. Given small sample sizes, the Aboriginal (n=5) and disability (n=4) statuses of these groups are not presented.



Section B: Transitions

This section will discuss findings from questions on all matters of transition. The transition from high school to post-secondary studies: the amount of time elapsed between, the sources of information consulted that may have helped to decide which post-secondary program to enter, and any other post-secondary courses taken between high school and the program they most recently finished. Another transition discussed is one within the post-secondary program: from the traditional learning channel (i.e. the class room) to the use of online or distant learning.

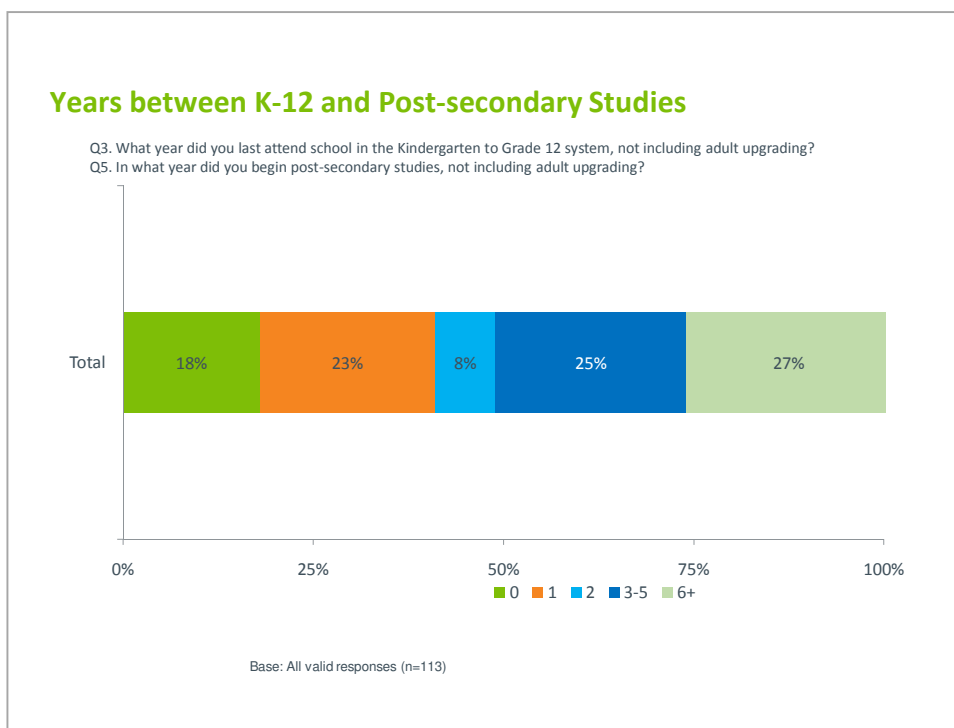
Continuing chronologically, the topics change to transitions after completion of their program: whether they have since entered another post-secondary program, and whether they stayed in the same location, or moved.

From High School to Post-secondary Studies

Time between finishing high school and entering most recent post-secondary study

A majority (52%) of private institution graduates waited at least three years after graduating from high school before entering the post-secondary program they most recently graduated from, including 27% who waited at least six years.

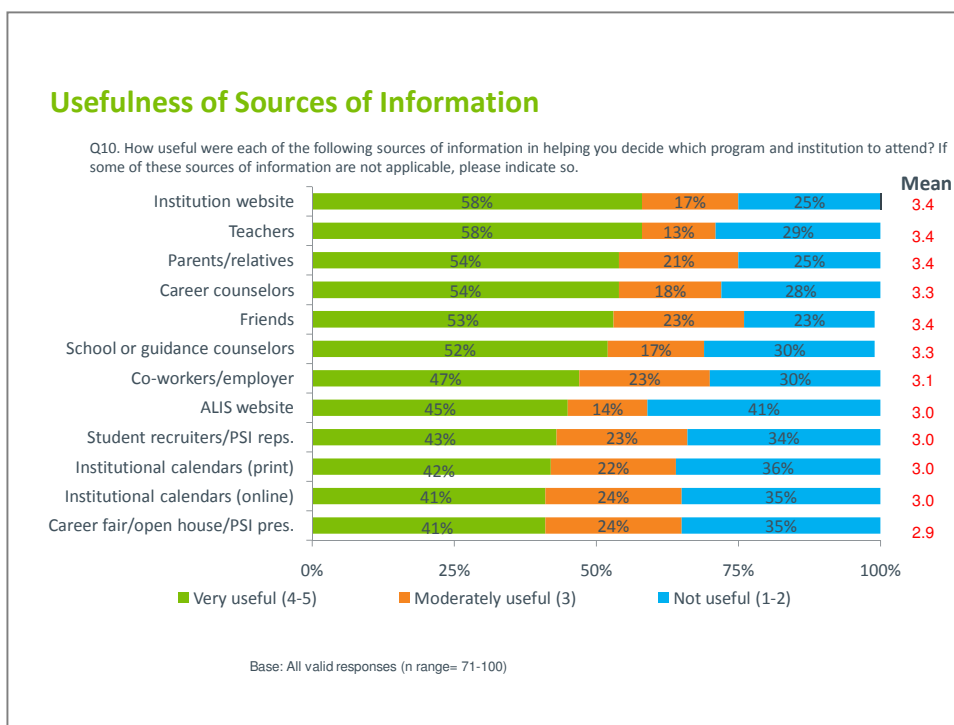
Close to one in five (18%) entered their program straight out of high school, while another one in four (23%) took a year off in between. Finally, about one in ten (8%) students waited two years before continuing on to post-secondary studies.



In preparation for post-secondary education: usefulness of information sources

Online resources and people close to the graduates were seen as the most valuable sources of information consulted in helping with the decision about which program and institution to choose for post-secondary education.

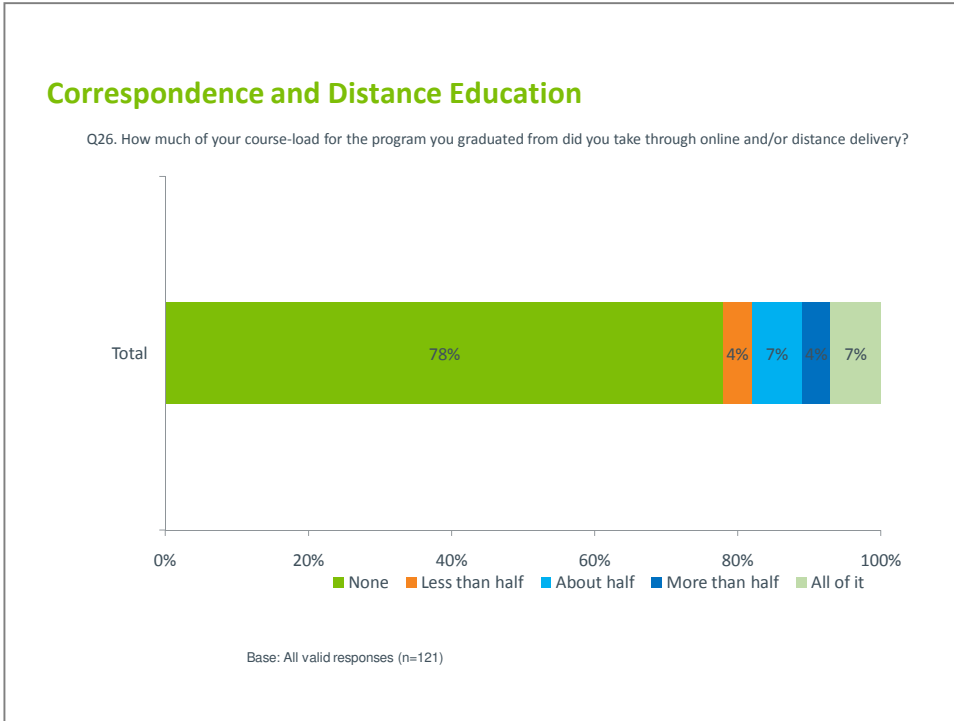
Among those private institution graduates who used them, individual institution websites, teachers, parents, and friends were seen as the most valuable of the information sources tested (mean score of 3.4 out of a possible 5). This was followed by school or guidance counselors, or career counselors (mean score of 3.3). No less than four in ten considered the other sources of information useful for helping them decide which institution to attend.



From the Classroom to Alternative Learning Channels

While taking courses the traditional way – going to a class – was by far the most popular way to study among private institution students, online or distance courses were taken by a small number of students.

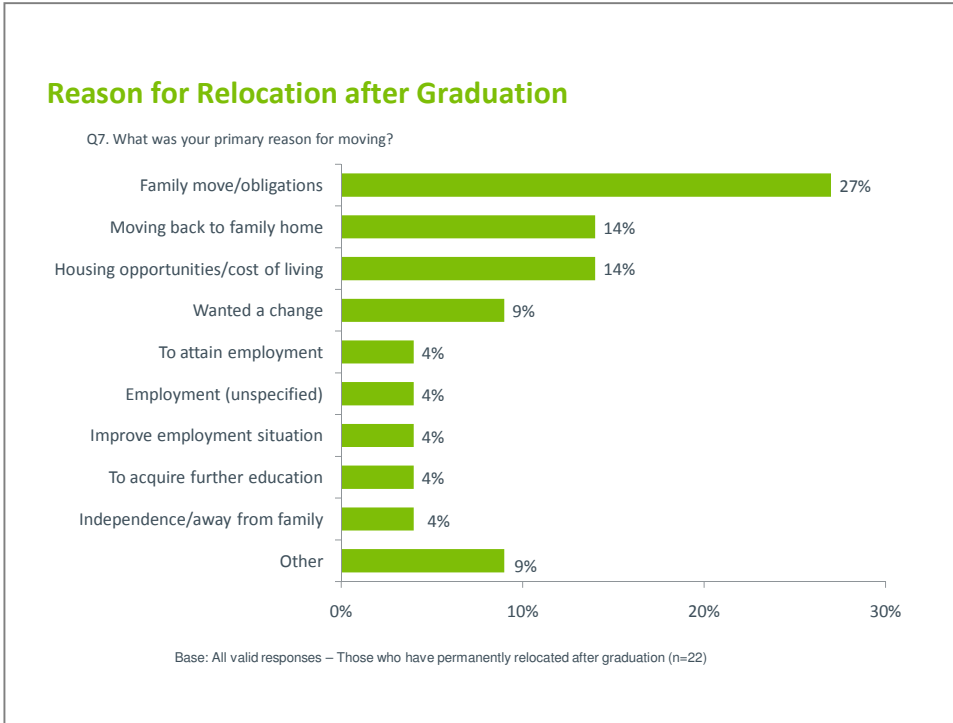
Overall, almost eight in ten (78%) graduates had not taken any courses through alternative channels, while 4% had done so for less than half of their course load, 7% for about half and the remainder for either more than half (4%) or all of their courses (7%).



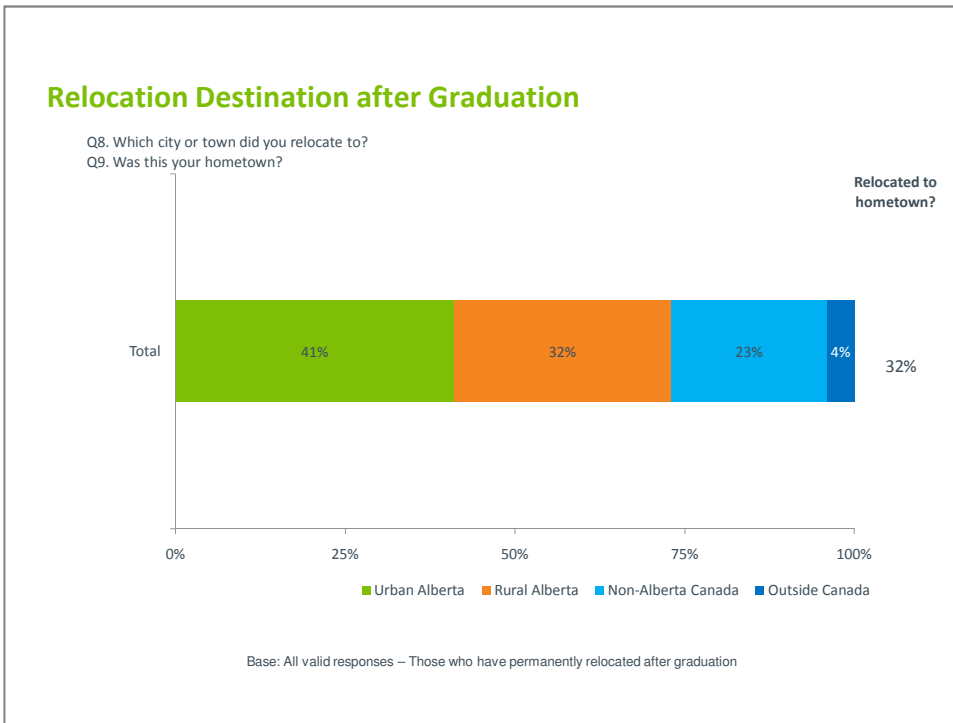
From One Location to Another

A sizeable majority of graduates (84%), when interviewed, lived in the same city or town where they studied. Some graduates did move home, or where the jobs were. Slightly less than one in five (18%) permanently relocated to a different town or city since graduation.

The main reason for relocating among private institution graduates was family-related, with 27% saying it was due to a family move or obligations. Additionally, 14% each moved back to the family home or because of the cost of living.



One in three graduates (32%) moved back to their hometown. Four in ten graduates (41%) relocated to an urban centre within Alberta, one in three (32%) to a rural setting, while one quarter (23%) moved out of the province altogether. The remaining 4% moved out of the country.



Section C: Goals and Satisfaction

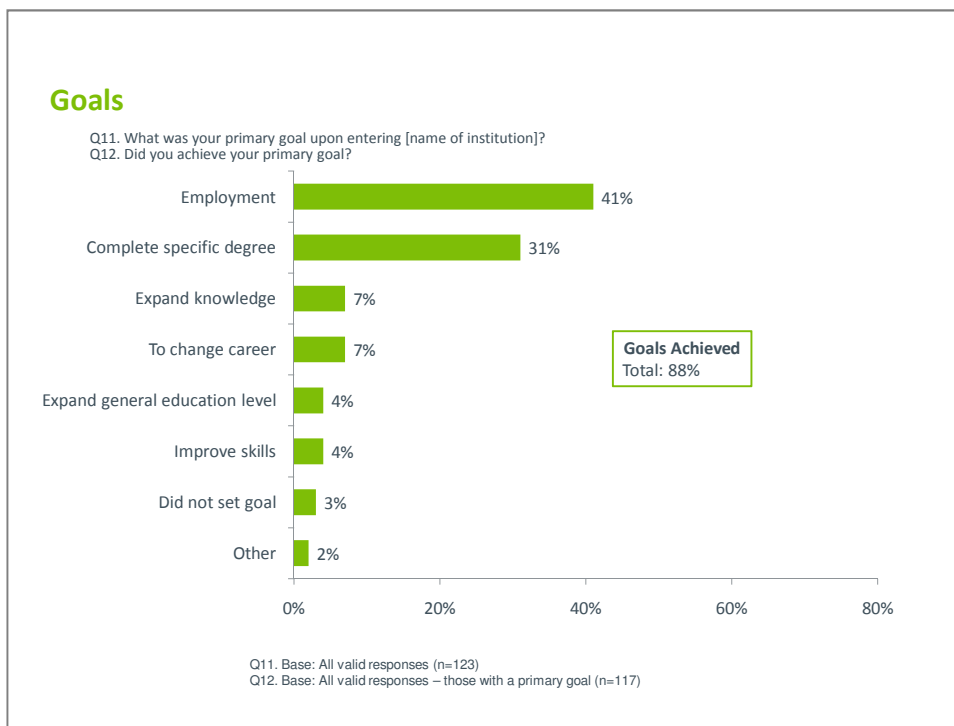
The following section will first look at the goals private institution graduates set before they started their program, and whether they obtained those goals upon graduation. Then the discussion turns to the skills and abilities acquired through graduates’ institutions and programs, graduates’ assessment of the quality of their program and overall educational experience, whether they would recommend their program and institution and whether it was worth the financial investment.

Finally, this section will discuss experience and satisfaction of students who took part in a study abroad program.

Goals

Four in ten (41%) graduates had set employment as their primary goal upon entering the private institution. At the same time, three in ten set their goal to complete a specific credential. A variety of other goals were stated by fewer graduates.

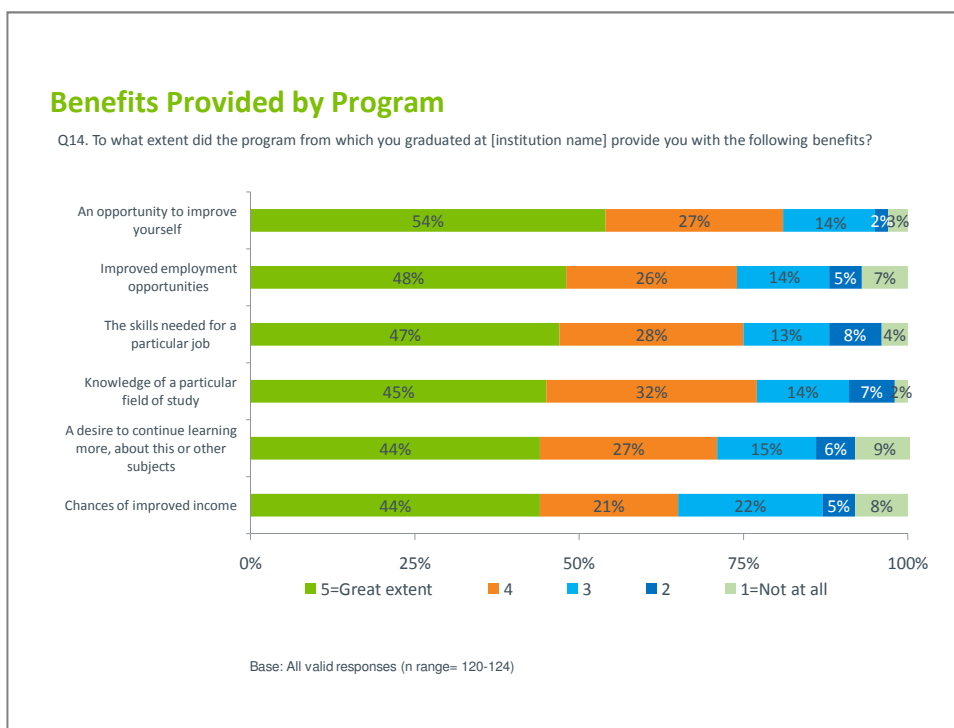
An overwhelming majority of graduates believed they achieved their primary goal. Indeed, almost nine in ten graduates (88%) held this view. The remaining 12% stated that they did not meet their primary goal. The reasons graduates state that they did not meet their goal are not presented as the sample size is too small.



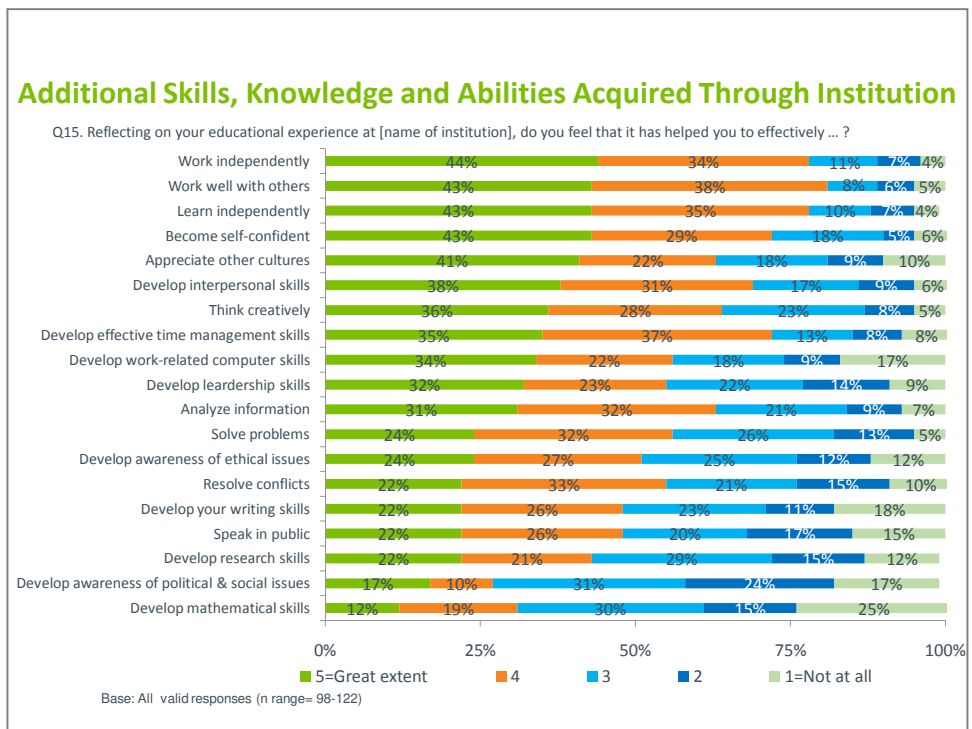
Benefits Provided by Institution and Program

The participating Alberta private post-secondary institutions appear to be successful at helping their graduates become better individuals and acquire a strong set of skills and abilities that will help them, in turn, be successful in their lives and careers.

Most graduates from private institutions felt their institution offered them an opportunity to improve themselves (81% rated the extent to which this was true, a 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale). Moreover, 75% said that it provided them with the skills required for a particular job. A similar proportion (74%) indicated that their institution allowed them to improve employment opportunities or that they fulfilled a desire to continue learning. Two in three graduates felt that their institution provided them with the knowledge of a particular field or a chance for improved income.



When asked to reflect on their educational experience, private institution graduates felt that their institution mainly helped them learn and work independently (78% rated either a 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale). Institutions also allowed their students to acquire a number of skills and abilities to varying degrees, as shown in the graphic below.

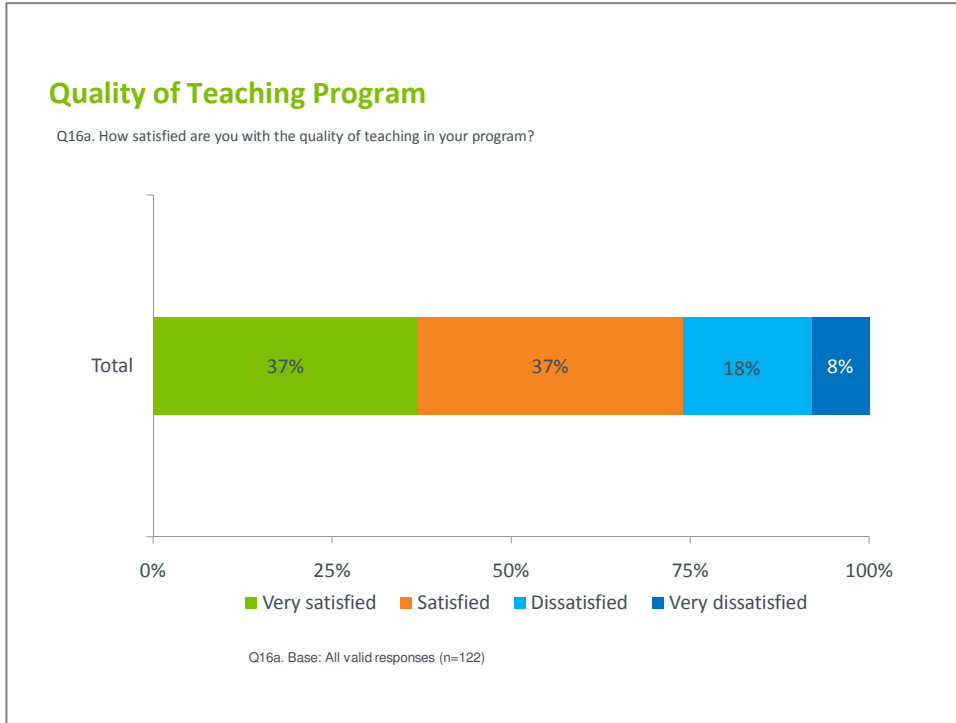


Quality Measures

About eight in ten private institution graduates indicated that they were very satisfied or satisfied with the quality provided by their institution and program.

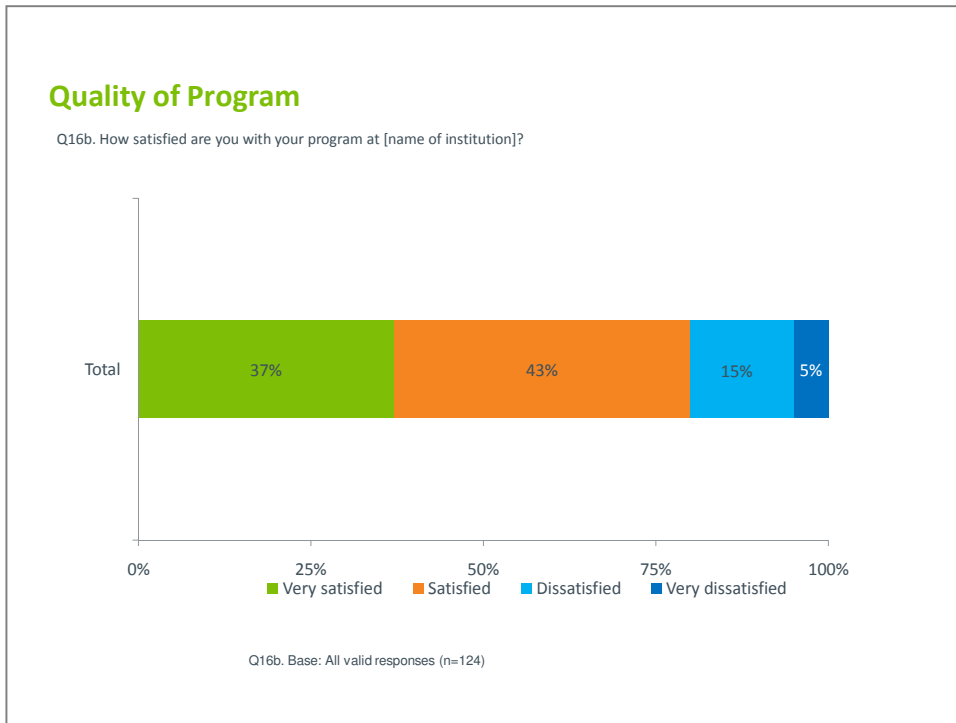
Quality of Teaching in Program

Satisfaction with the quality of teaching was quite high among private institution graduates, with three in four saying they were satisfied, including 37% who were very satisfied. Meanwhile, 24% said they were dissatisfied with the quality of the teaching in their program, including eight percent who expressed a high degree of dissatisfaction.



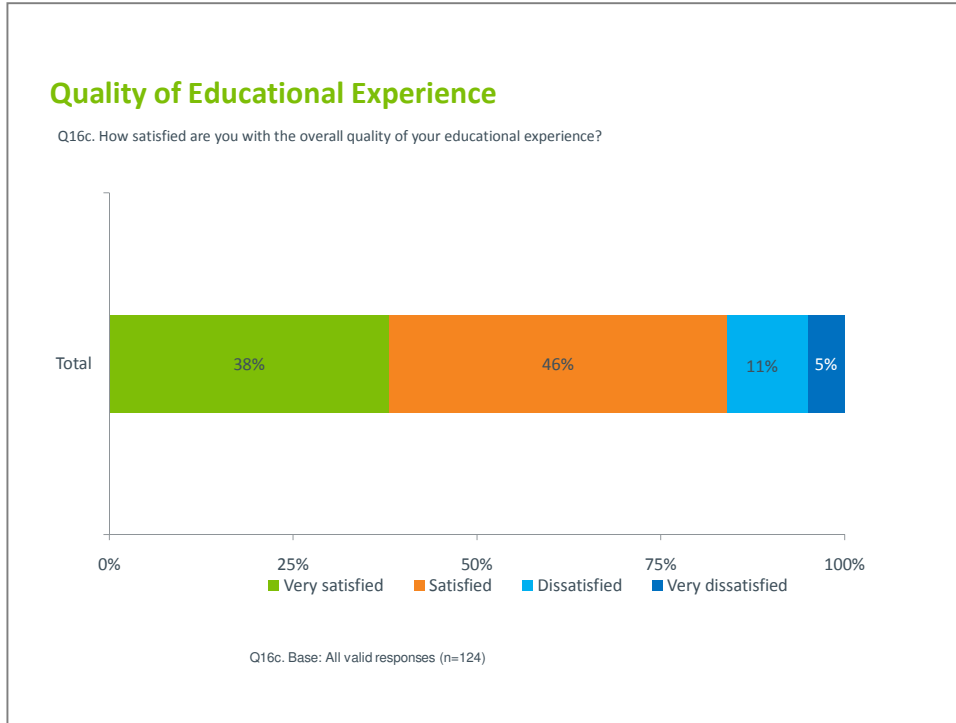
Quality of Program Delivered at Institution

When asked about the quality of their program, eight in ten were satisfied, including 37% who were very satisfied. Again, about one in five expressed dissatisfaction, with five percent who were very dissatisfied with the quality of the program.



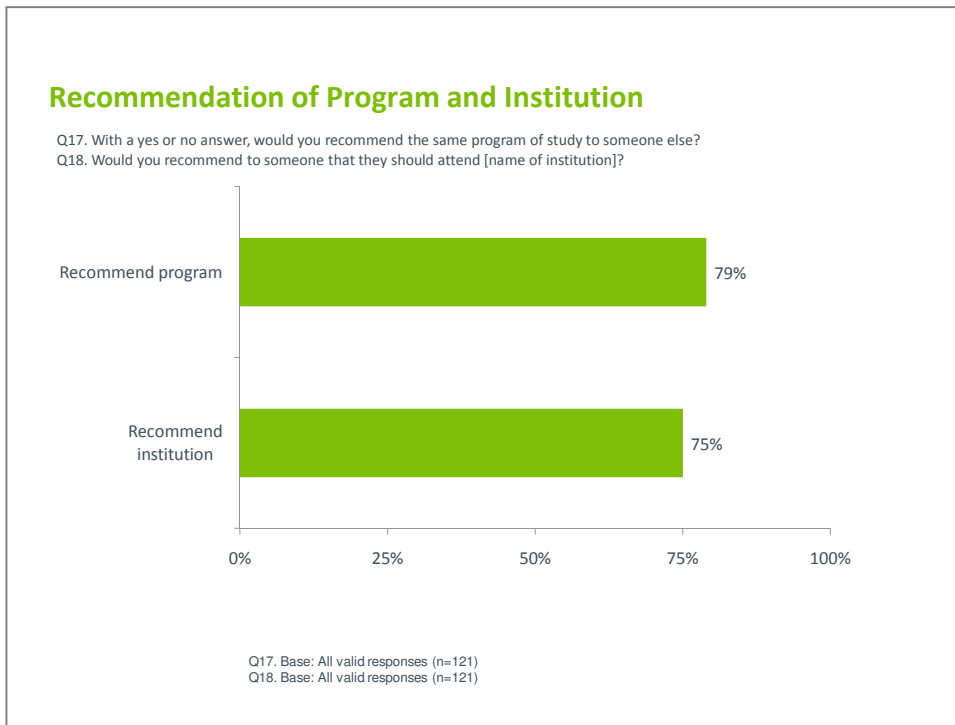
Quality of Educational Experience

Satisfaction was highest among graduates for the quality of their educational experience. In fact, over eight in ten (84%) said they were satisfied overall. Less than one in five (16%) expressed some level of dissatisfaction with the quality of their educational experience.



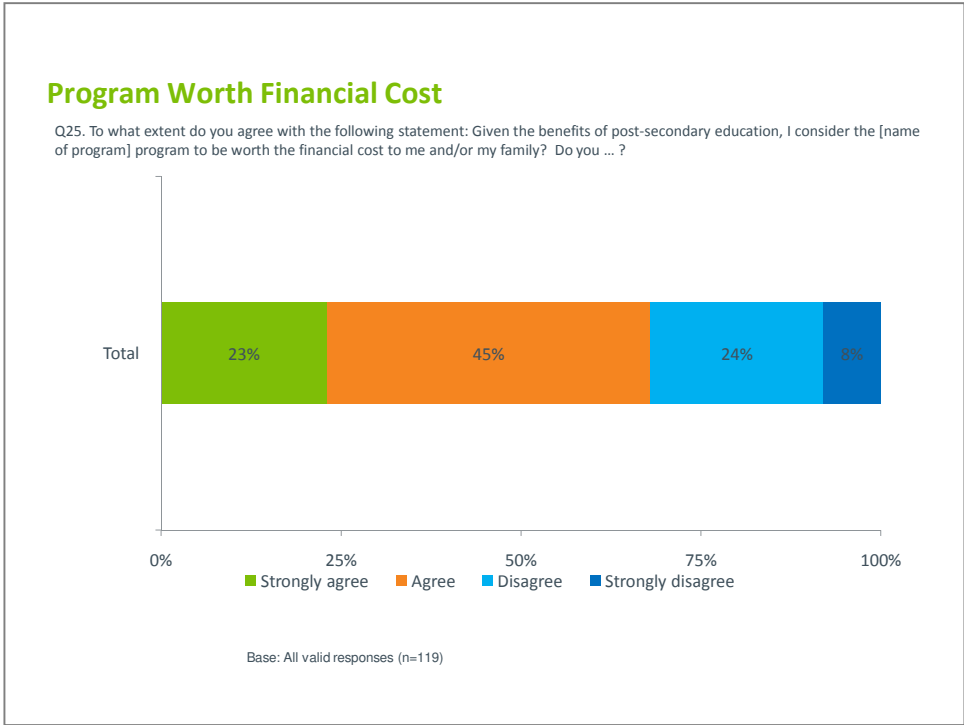
Recommendation of Program and Institution

The majority of graduates would recommend both the institution they attended and the program they completed. Three in four said they would recommend either the program or institution to someone else.



Perceived Cost/Benefit of Post-secondary Studies

A majority of private institution graduates believed that the financial investment in their post-secondary studies was worth it for the benefits gained. Indeed, 68% of graduates agreed that the benefits provided by their program outweighed the financial costs to them and/or their family.



Studying Abroad

A very small group of private institution graduates (2%) participated in a study abroad program outside of Canada. Due to the small sample size (n=2), detailed findings on satisfaction, country, and language of study are not presented, as they are not meaningful.

Section D: Financing

Forty-eight percent of private institution graduates worked while taking classes and many also relied on further financial aid. This section discusses not only how many private institution graduates worked, but also looks at those other sources of income and the amounts received from government-sponsored student loans, non-government financing, scholarships, grants and bursaries.

Employment While in School

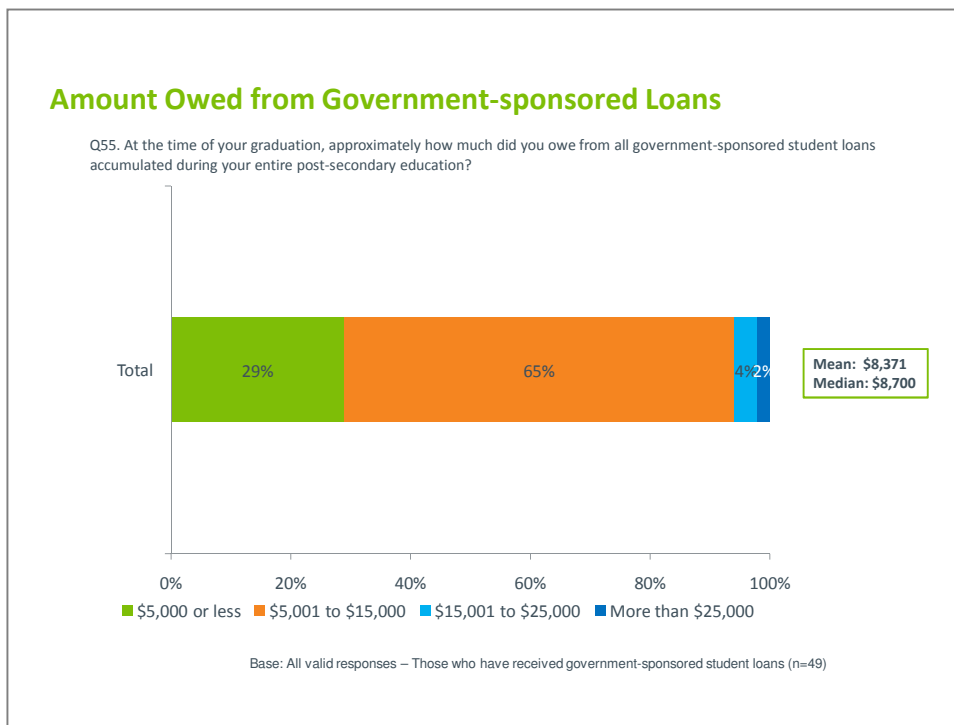
Almost half of private institution graduates worked while taking classes.

Loans

Government-Sponsored Student Loans

Forty-seven percent of private institution graduates received government-sponsored student loans.

The average loan amount from government sources private institution graduates received was \$8,371.00. The majority of graduates received between \$5,001 and \$15,000. About three in ten received \$5,000 or less and few (6%) received a loan for more than \$15,000.



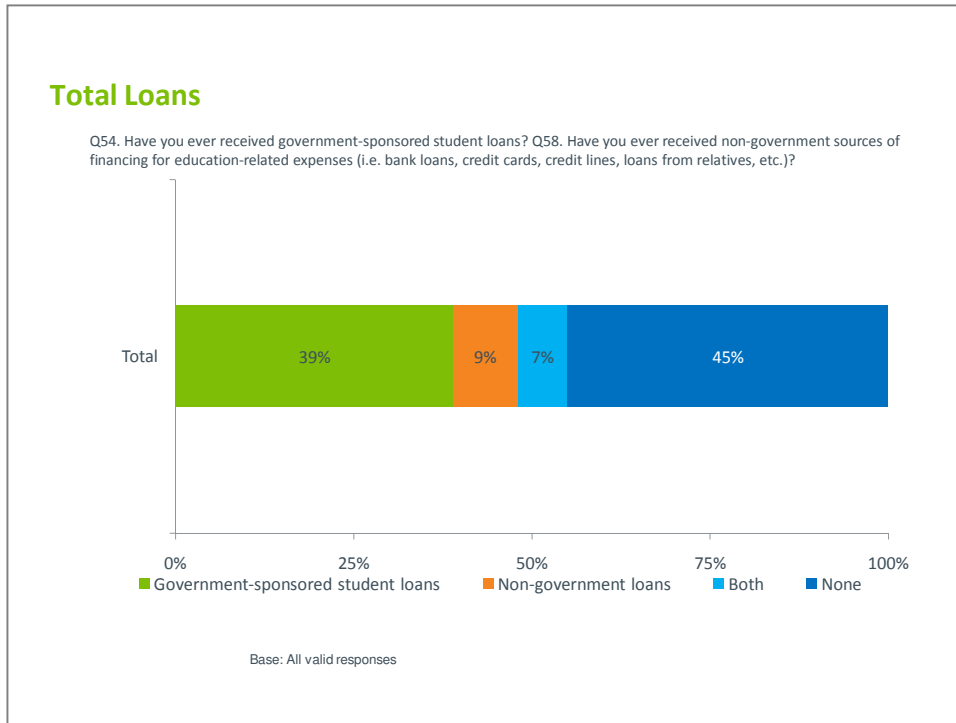
Non-government Sources of Financing

Sixteen percent of private institution graduates tapped into other sources of financing such as bank loans, credit lines, credit cards or loans from other people.

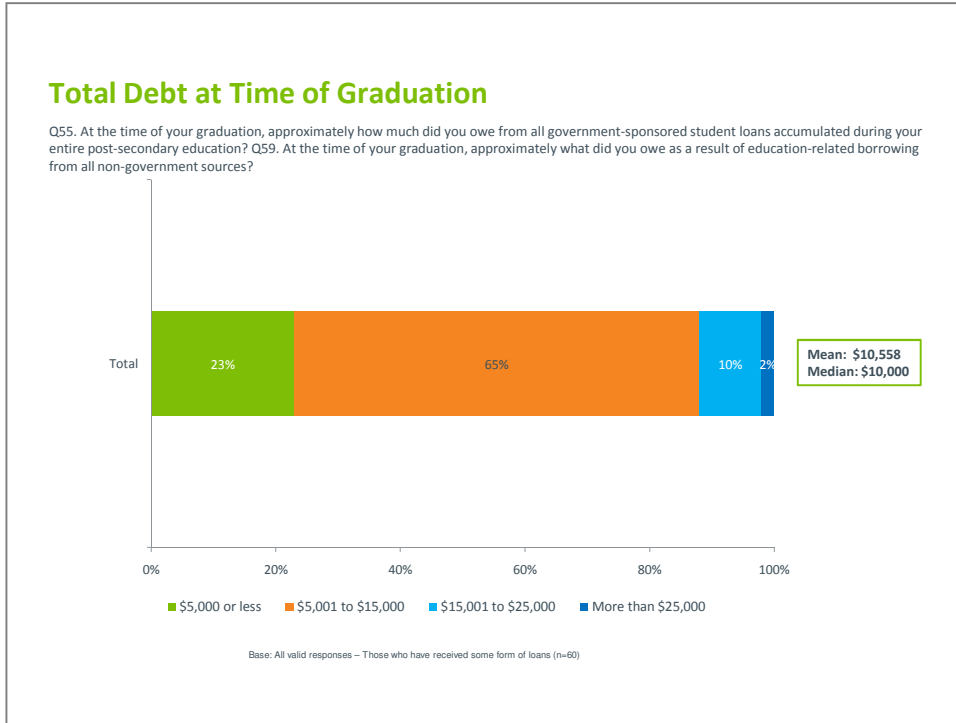
Given the small number of valid responses (n=14) for the amount owed as a result of borrowing from non-government sources, these findings are not presented.

Loans - Combined

More than half of all private institution graduates received some kind of loan throughout their study period. While 45% did not have any loans, 7% of graduates had both government and non-government loans. When receiving one type of loan over the other, private institution graduates clearly received, by a margin of 4:1 to government loans: 39% received these types of loans exclusively, while 9% received only non-government student loans.



Combining both types of loans paints a picture of the debt load carried by this cohort upon graduation. The mean total debt was \$10,558 with the majority having debt between \$5,000 and \$15,000.



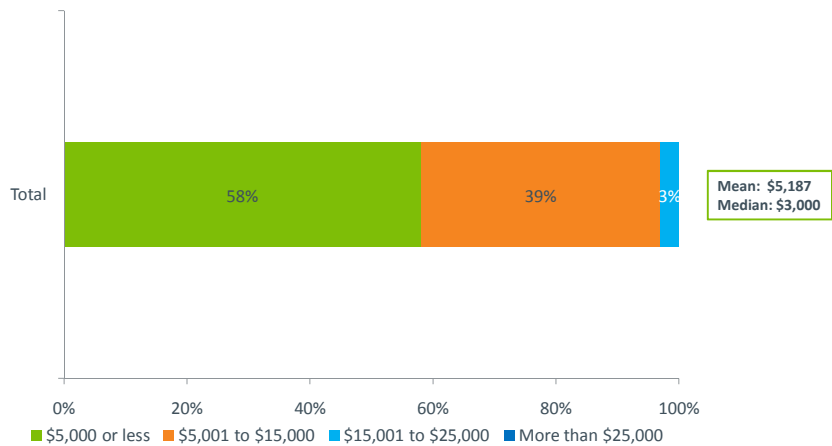
Scholarships, Grants or Bursaries

Besides loans, a sizeable minority (39%) of students financed (at least part of) their studies through scholarships, grants or bursaries.

The average amount received in these types of financial help by private institution graduates was smaller than loans, at \$5,187. Scholarships, bursaries and grants were most likely to have been provided in smaller amounts than loans: 58% of private institution graduate recipients reported getting under \$5,000, 39% between \$5,001 and \$15,000, while 3% received more than that.

Amount Received in Scholarships, Grants or Bursaries

Q57. How much did you receive in scholarships, grants and/or bursaries during your post-secondary studies?



Base: All valid responses – Those who have received scholarships/grants and/or bursaries (n=31)

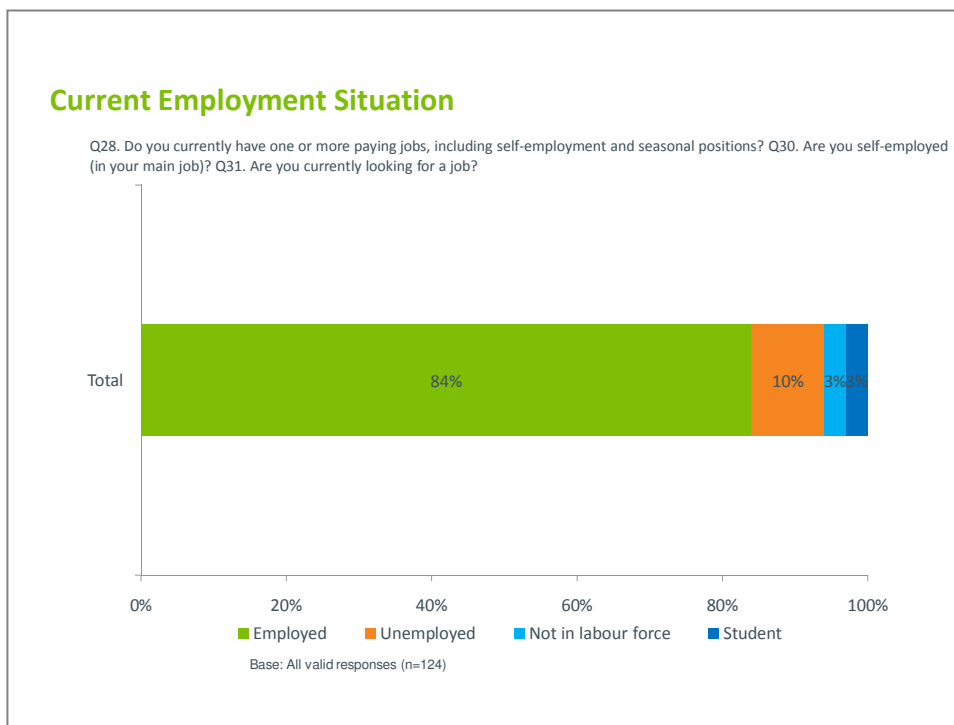
Section E: Outcomes

Before entering a post-secondary program, goals are often set, while after graduating, outcomes can be measured. This section discusses the goals graduates had set for themselves before commencing their studies as well as outcomes relating to employment and income.

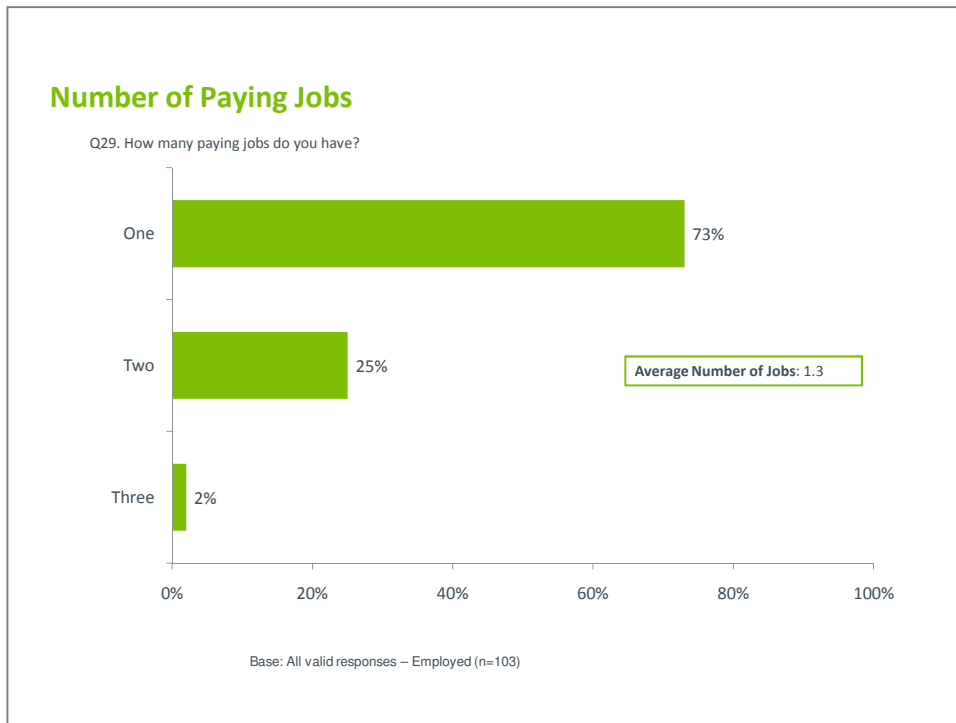
The type of job graduates from the four private institutions included in this study obtained after graduating, income earned, how related the job was to their field of study, the qualification required for that job and satisfaction on the job will be presented in this section of the report.

Employment

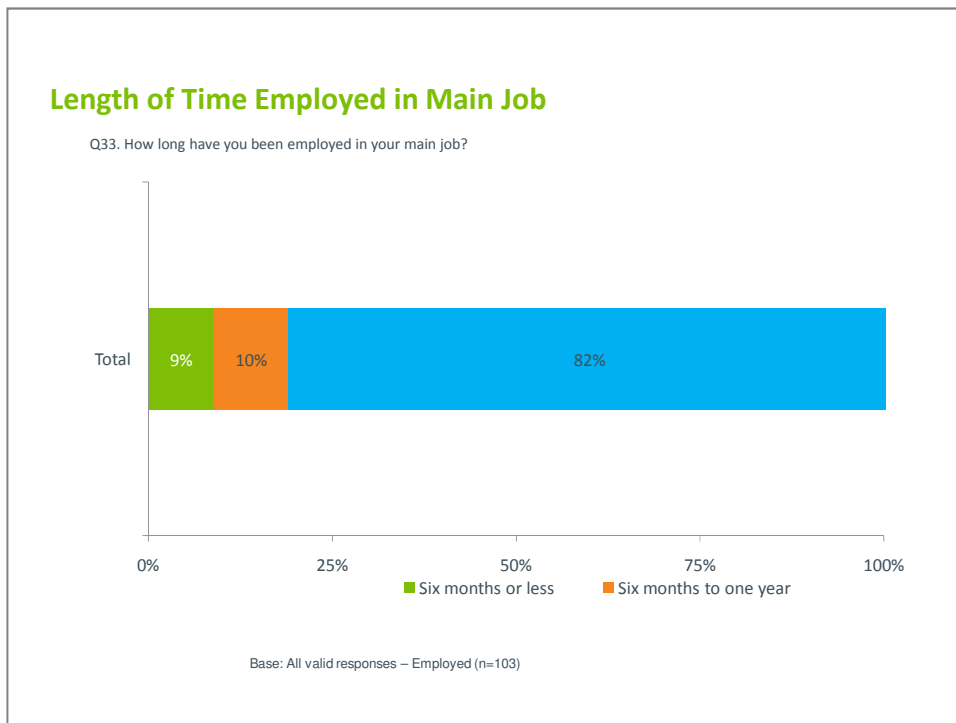
The vast majority of graduates (84%) were employed at the time of the survey. Meanwhile, a very small proportion (3%) indicated that they were still a student. Others were unemployed (10%) or not in the labour force (3%).



Graduates from private institutions averaged having 1.3 jobs. The vast majority of graduates held one job, and an additional one in four (25%) held two. A very small proportion of graduates (2%) held three jobs at the time of surveying.



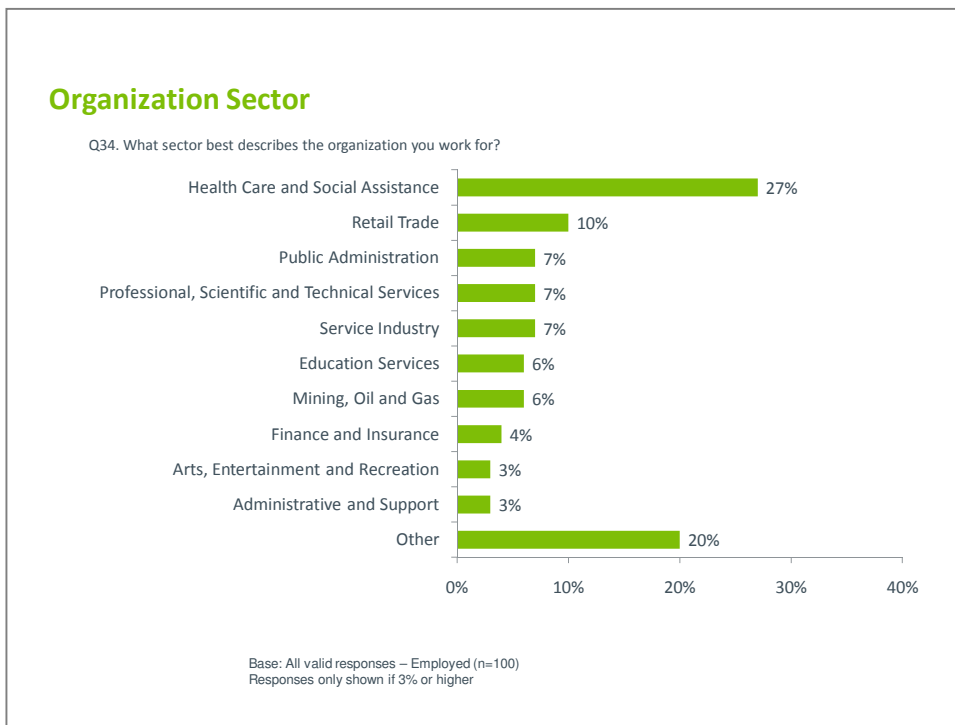
A large majority of graduates have held their main position for at least one year. Meanwhile, similar proportions have held their main job for less than six months (9%) or between six months and one year (10%).



While the survey probed reasons for not looking for a job, the sample size (n=5) for these results is too small to present the findings.

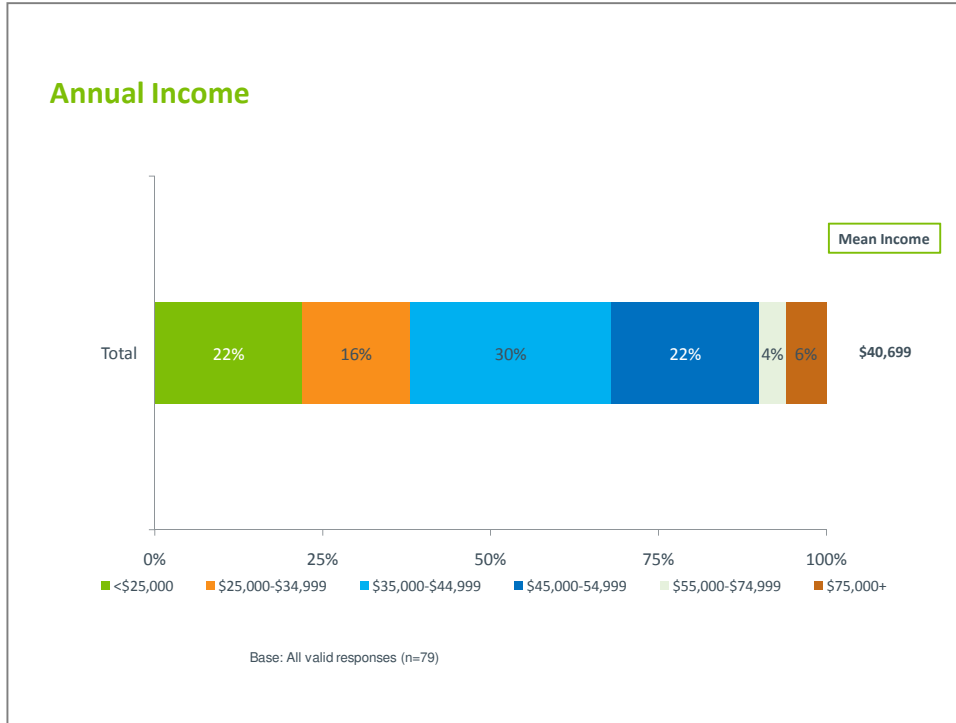
Sectors

Just over one in four (27%) graduates from private institutions worked in the health and social assistance sector. One in ten (10%) worked in the retail industry. As the graph below indicates, the remaining proportion of graduates worked across a number of different sectors.



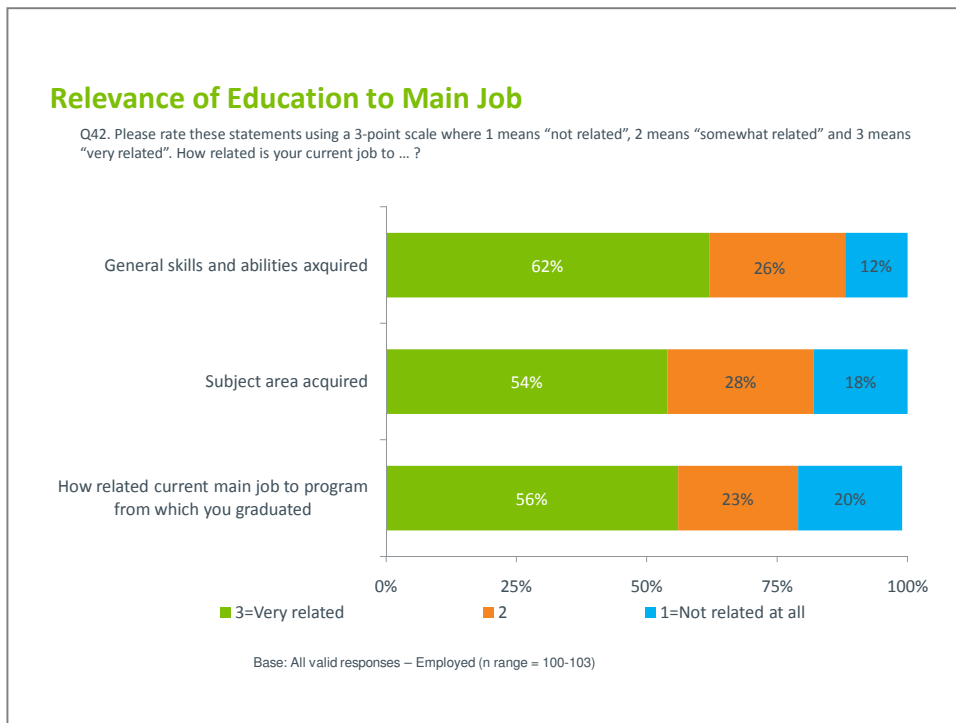
Annual Income

On average, private institution graduates reported an annual income of \$40,699. Meanwhile, one in five reported an income of less than \$25,000, and a similar proportion stated an income of either between \$45,000 and \$54,999. Fewer reported an income of between \$25,000 and \$34,999. Meanwhile, one in ten reported an income of between \$55,000 and \$74,999 or \$75,000 or more.

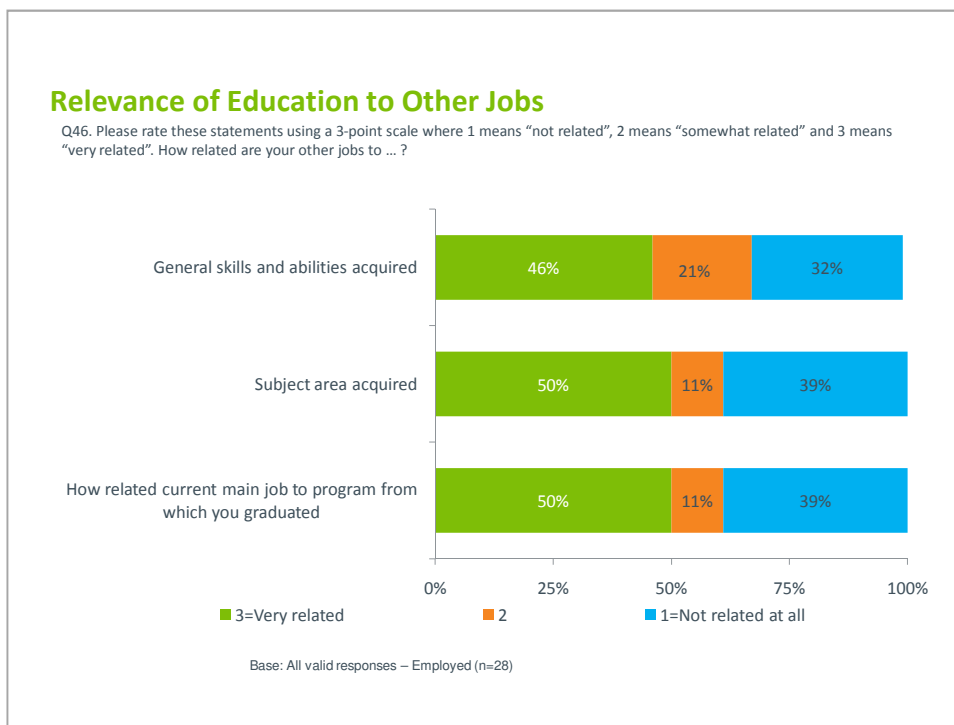


Relevance of Education to Main and Other Jobs

A majority of graduates believed that their main job was very related to the general skills and abilities they acquired (62%), the program from which they graduated (56%), and the subject area acquired (54%).



Of the few graduates (n=28) with other jobs, almost half say this job is very related to the skills, subject area, or subject matter of their studies.

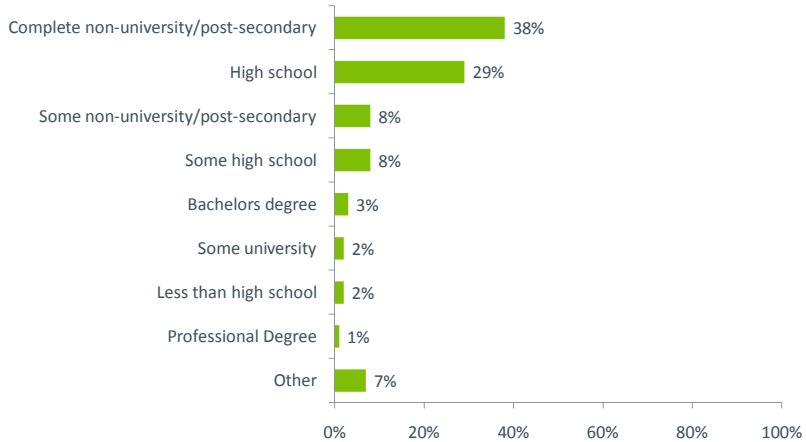


Qualifications

Graduates from private institutions were most likely to state that a non-university post-secondary education was required for their current job (38%). Somewhat fewer said a high school diploma was required (29%). A number of other educational qualifications were required by fewer graduates.

Education Needed for Current Job

Q47. When you were selected for your main job, what was the highest level of education needed to get the job?

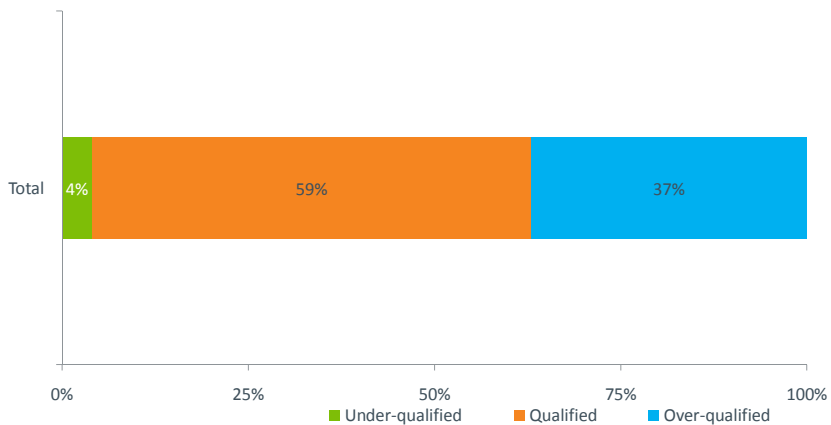


Base: All valid responses – Employed (n=90)

Graduates were most likely to agree that they were qualified for their current position, with six in ten stating this. A significant minority (37%) however stated that they felt over-qualified for their current position. Very few agreed that they were under-qualified for their current job.

Qualified for Main Job

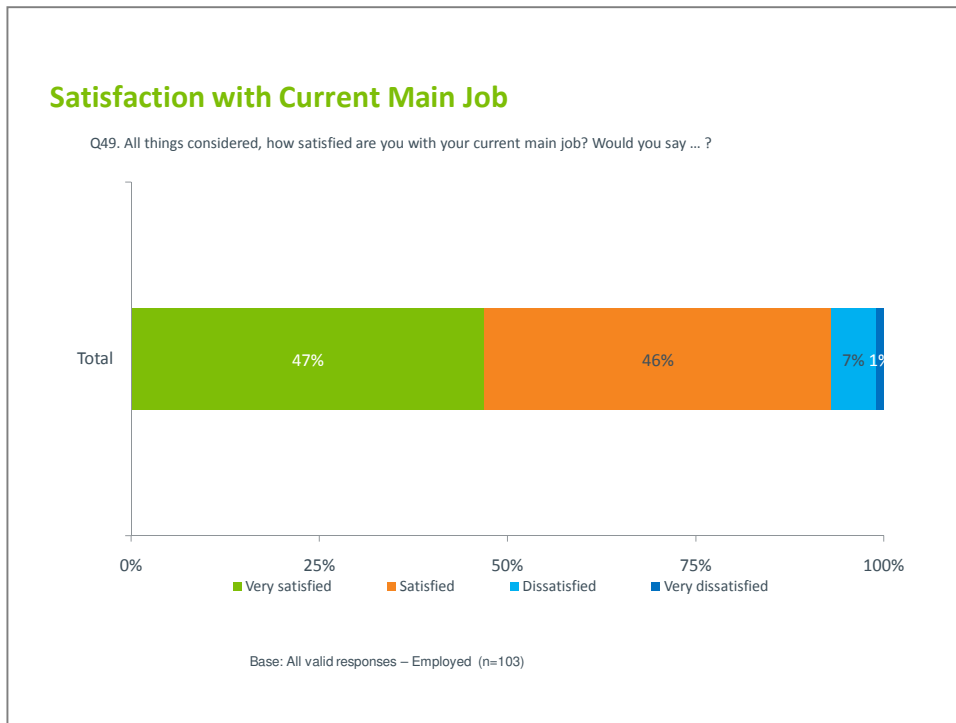
Q48. Given your education, training and experience, how qualified do you feel you are for your main job?



Base: All valid responses – Employed (n=103)

Job Satisfaction

Most graduates from private institutions said that they were satisfied with their current job. Indeed, over nine in ten said they were satisfied, with 47% claiming to be *very* satisfied. Very few expressed dissatisfaction with their current main job.



Conclusions and Recommendations

This year represents the first time that the Ministry has included graduates from private vocational institutions offering licensed programs in its Graduate Outcomes Survey. Initiated as a pilot project, involving four private vocational training providers, the purpose of this project was to inform the development of future surveys examining graduates' satisfaction with their employment outcomes approximately two years after graduation. The survey provides a good opportunity to gain a greater understanding of the private vocational training system in Alberta.

Although the data collected and analyzed cannot be generalized to the private vocational training system, it appears that a number of the questions may be applicable and suitable to graduates from this sector. It is likely, however, given the uniqueness of this sector that a number of questions are potentially not applicable and a refinement and focus of the survey for subsequent years will be required. It is also important to capture the lessons learned by the four participating institutions in terms of their roles and responsibilities in the survey, in order to inform future developments.

Appendix A: Data Collection Methodology

SURVEY DESIGN

AET provided Harris/Decima with a draft baseline questionnaire. Harris/Decima's project team worked closely with the AET Project Authority to review the question wording, structure, and order to ensure that the survey instrument captured the information required.

Once the telephone version of the survey was finalized, a version was adapted for an online surveying interface. The questionnaires used in each method contained the same questions, however in some instances they were presented or ordered slightly differently to account for the completion method. Employing a multi-method approach did not in any way jeopardize the integrity of the findings or the comparability of the data.

PROGRAMMING

Once both questionnaires were finalized and approved by the AET Project Authority, Harris/Decima's in-house programming team programmed the surveys for telephone (CATI) and online (CAWI) surveying. One senior programmer was assigned this project and programmed all versions of the survey to ensure consistency throughout.

Harris/Decima's programming process includes thorough quality assurance checks. All survey links were tested internally by the programming department and the consulting team prior to launching. Links were carefully checked for language, flow, skip logic, consistency between versions, and similarity to the approved paper questionnaires.

To manage the various phases of this project better and to track individual students through the multiple completion options better (phone, online, referrals, callbacks, etc.) a number of separate studies were designed which all contained the same core survey. The introductions in each study were tailored to match the specific context of each scenario.

Telephone programming: Harris/Decima used VOXCO's "Interviewer" CATI program for telephone data collection. This CATI program features a programming language that allows for maximum flexibility. The software provides complete control over entry flow, including skips, valid ranges, and logical error-trapping. The "Interviewer" system imports sample directly from databases – no need for re-entry and no entry errors. Moreover, the system automates all scheduling and call-back tasks, ensuring that every appointment is set within project time limitations and that an interviewer is available for every call-back.

Online programming: Harris/Decima used VOXCO's Interviewer Web CAWI software for data collection in online surveys. Interviewer Web includes support for random respondent selection, respondent identity verification via passwords (numeric passwords up to 12 digits) and for quota control. It also features adaptive questionnaire logic designed to provide many of the same methodological safeguards associated with traditional CATI telephone interviewing (i.e., randomized ordering of variables being tested in a battery, skip patterns based on responses given). The package

allows the project manager to track non-responses to survey requests and provides estimates of non-response bias.

SAMPLE MANAGEMENT

Harris/Decima and all institutions initially received template files from AET (provided through Edulink). Separate files for each institution included a list of all students who graduated in 2007-2008, the program from which they graduated, and their unique identifiers (Alberta Student Number or ASN, and Student #s). These files contained no contact information or personal information for students.

Each institution then filled out the template file for their school with the student contact information they had on file in student records. Using Edulink, these completed files were submitted to Harris/Decima where they were compared to the original template file and validated. This reconciliation process ensured that Ministry records and institutional records matched; the only discrepancies that were found were duplicate student entries and student records with missing information. Harris/Decima worked directly with the institutions to resolve any issues that arose.

Sample files were provided to Harris/Decima in two waves: one for pretesting and one for the full survey launch. In each instance, the sampling team reconciled the institutional files against the template files and then cleaned the data. Sample cleaning included:

- **Evaluating duplicate records:** Students who graduated from more than one institution and/or program in 2007/2008 were only able to complete this graduate outcome survey once. As such, one program was chosen based on their highest accreditation, as follows:
 - Degree - Doctoral
 - Degree - Master
 - Diploma - Post-Degree
 - Degree – Bachelor or Applied
 - Diploma
 - Certificate - Post-Basic Certificate

In the case of multiple accreditations at the same level, one program was chosen at random to be the focus of this survey.

- **Missing contact information:** In some instances, contact information was not provided for students. In these cases, a list of ASNs with missing information was sent back to the individual institutions for review. In almost all cases, the institutions were unable to provide additional information because they did not have it on file.
- **Cleaning phone numbers:** A query of all student phone numbers was conducted to ensure their proper formatting for input into Harris/Decima's CATI interviewing system. Many phone numbers, especially those outside North America, required reformatting. Other information provided in the student record such as mailing address was used to establish area codes and country of origin for these phone numbers.

CENSUS APPROACH

The target audience for this study was all 2007-2008 graduates from licensed programs at four private post-secondary institutions.

Harris/Decima employed a census data collection approach, meaning that all graduates had the opportunity to participate in this study.

PRETESTING

Prior to the fielding of this study, Harris/Decima conducted a thorough pre-test. This is standard procedure for all Harris/Decima surveys, and it is a valuable tool to ensure that the survey is properly constructed and fully tested before going to field. Due to the relatively small universe of private institution graduates, the pre-test was only conducted with graduates from public institutions.

As explained in greater detail in the “survey administration” section below, initial contact with students was always made by telephone. Students could then opt to complete the survey online, whereby they were sent an email invitation and unique URL to the survey. In the case of the pre-test, email invites were only sent to students who we spoke with directly and referral email addresses were not collected. Also, reminder emails were not sent out to non-responsive students until the full launch of the study.

Following the pre-test, the Harris/Decima project team listened to recordings of the phone interviews and suggested some minor questionnaire edits to AET. All recordings were also made available to AET. Since no major changes were made following the pretest, all pretest interviews were included in the final data set. Approved edits were made to both the phone and online programming and all links were re-tested prior to the survey’s full launch.

INTERVIEWER SELECTION AND TRAINING

The selection and training of interviewers are important elements of the study design contributing to high quality data. It is vital that interviewers know that response rate is important to the success of the study and they should employ all possible strategies to encourage participation. Harris/Decima has been very fortunate in recruiting, training, and maintaining an excellent team of interviewing, monitoring and supervisory personnel. We recruit staff from the various post-secondary educational institutions in the area of our two call centres (Ottawa, Montreal). We also recruit non-students wanting a full-time, rewarding position – many of our staff have been with us for years. In addition, each interviewer has undergone rigorous training. During the training sessions, interviewers are taught the art and science of telephone recruitment and interviewing. Staff training draws from the Market Research and Intelligence Association (MRIA) and Council of American Survey Research Organizations (CASRO) standards manuals, the Council for Marketing and Opinion Research (CMOR) interviewing training program, and online CATI practice modules to develop interviewers’ skills.

Only experienced interviewers were chosen to conduct calling on this study. A dedicated team of interviewers was selected due to the size, complexity, and lengthy field period of this study. In addition to the standard training that all interviewers undergo, these interviewers received additional, study-specific training. The training session was led by members of the consulting staff along with

field supervisors. Content included a thorough explanation of the study objectives, a question-by-question review of the survey questions, and an in-depth review of the various study types and contexts so that interviewers would better understand the nature and objective of each introduction text. All interviewers were provided with a detailed ‘briefing document’ to keep on hand during telephone interviewing and were encouraged to ask any questions to supervisors and consulting staff.

SURVEY ADMINISTRATION

After thoroughly pre-testing the questionnaire and making the required edits, Harris/Decima fully launched data collection on January 21, 2010.

Students were initially contacted by telephone and invited to complete the survey immediately, schedule a callback appointment, or to conduct the study online. In cases where students could not be reached directly, telephone interviewers tried to obtain referral contact information from the person they were speaking with (alternate phone number or email address) or tried to establish what time they could be reached at.

A project-specific email account at Harris/Decima was set up to allow direct contact with a member of the project team. In many cases, this email address was given out by interviewers to people who were not comfortable providing us with the student’s updated contact information. Any student who emailed this account was sent an email invitation to the study or called by telephone to conduct the interview, based on the information provided in the email and any noted preference for completion method.

When student emails were provided, either from the student directly or as a referral, an email invitation was automatically sent from the CATI system. Using unique URLs, it was possible to track each student record and determine whether or not they completed the survey. If a student had not completed the survey, a series of two reminder emails were sent to them. Generally, throughout the field process reminders were sent on Thursdays and Mondays, incorporating all recruitment from the previous 3-4 days. Following these reminders, if the student had still not completed the survey a telephone interviewer would call them back (or the person who provided referral) and ask if they were still interested in participating in the survey.

It should also be noted that when email addresses were obtained through referrals, an additional note in the email invitation explained how we acquired the student’s email address and also included an “unsubscribe” option, which was recorded as a “student refusal” disposition.

The below chart depicts the various ways a student could flow through this study:

Online Survey Administration: To complete the online survey, the respondent either “clicked” on or typed-in the URL that was included as part of the invitation email they received. This unique address took them directly to the Harris/Decima web location containing the survey. The location had a front page that provided information on the purpose of the study and encouraged participation. The survey web site could be accessed 24 hours a day, seven days a week from any web-enabled computer, and the survey was kept “live” for the specified study period (January 21 – April 30, 2010).

Once at the site, the student could complete the survey moving at their own pace and taking whatever time they required to consider the questions and provide their responses. Also, since each URL was unique to the student, the survey could be saved and completed at a later point in time.

Harris/Decima also offered a “help desk” feature so that respondents could contact Harris/Decima by e-mail with inquiries, requests for help, or comments about the survey. All requests received a response within 24 hours. Respondents also had the option of contacting Harris/Decima by telephone (toll free) during business hours.

Harris/Decima is in the business of conducting professional public opinion and market research and our integrity is founded on the accurate collection and tabulation of data. To accomplish this, the company has developed comprehensive in-house capability and quality control measures for data collection, data processing, and tabulation that ensure accuracy and completeness. Harris/Decima complies with all Market Research and Intelligence Association (MRIA) and the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA) standards and registers all studies in the National Survey Registration System.

STUDENT LOOK-UPS

A large number of student records contained out-of-date contact information, making it difficult to reach students. Generally, two scenarios arose:

- Phone number had been reassigned to a new customer who did not know the student or did not know how to reach the student; or
- The number was out of service.

In total, 3,291 unique records were added to a separate “look-up” study. Attempts were then made to gather new contact information for these students using alternate methods. Two approaches were used during the field process to complete this.

1. **Manual Look-ups:** Members of Harris/Decima’s sampling team used Canada411.ca to look up students who could not be reached through the contact information we had on file. They began by searching on the fullest version of a name that was possible and cutting the name down until results were found. For example, for student record John Andrew Smith, they would search using the following order:
 - John Andrew Smith
 - John A. Smith
 - John Smith
 - J. Smith

If multiple records were found geographic limitations were used to narrow down the pool of potential records, starting within Alberta and branching out nationally. Up to 50 potential phone numbers for each student were loaded into the sample in order of likelihood of success (i.e. the number for John Andrew Smith located in Alberta was called on first). On average, ten possible phone numbers were found for each student record.

This method proved very time consuming and relatively inefficient, resulting in only 25 completions after approximately a full month of calling. As such, automatic lookups were introduced.

- 2. Automatic Look-ups:** This process involved conducting a name comparison of over 3,000 unreachable students against Harris/Decima’s sample provider’s database of general Canadian population. This process saved time and effort since the comparison of databases was done automatically. The same name and geographic rules mentioned above were used to limit the pool of phone numbers. This method resulted in an additional 67 completes.

In both look-up methods, a specific introduction was written to account for the nature of the searches. The interviewer explained why they were looking for the student and ensured that they had found the right person by verifying graduation information (“Did you graduate from the University of Alberta in 2007 or 2008?”). Interviewers working on this portion of the study were thoroughly briefed about the nature of the lookup study and how to approach respondents.

Dispositions

Following the data collection, all studies were merged and a final disposition was determined for each student record. The table on the following page depicts the final dispositions for each private institution included in the research and also provides an explanation of each disposition category.

Table 1: Private Institution Final Dispositions

INSTITUTION	SAMPLE				Dispositions						
	Total Edulink Sample	Duplicates	Missing Info	Total loaded sample	A	Total Usable Sample	B	C	D	E	Actual Completes
ALL PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS	842	17	1	824	207	617	204	92	176	21	124
% of Edulink Sample	100%	2.0%	0.1%	97.9%	24.6%	73.3%	24.2%	10.9%	20.9%	2.5%	14.7%
Academy of Learning	309	3	0	307	81	226	80	40	50	6	50
Academy of Learning - Calgary NE	29	0	0	29	8	21	5	4	4	1	7
Academy of Learning - Edmonton Downtown	82	1	0	81	17	64	23	10	17	2	12
Academy of Learning - Edmonton South	38	0	0	38	12	26	12	5	5	1	3
Academy of Learning - West Edmonton Mall	63	2	0	63	17	46	18	8	9	1	10
Academy of Learning - Medicine Hat	31	0	0	30	4	26	7	5	5	0	9
Academy of Learning - Red Deer	66	0	0	66	23	43	15	8	10	1	9
Columbia College	163	9	1	150	33	117	46	18	25	5	23
Marvel College	262	2	0	259	65	194	68	27	57	7	35
Marvel College - Calgary	80	1	0	80	23	57	17	7	19	2	12
Marvel College - Edmonton	105	1	0	103	21	82	26	13	22	4	17
Marvel College - Red Deer	77	0	0	76	21	55	25	7	16	1	6
Reeves College	108	3	0	108	28	80	10	7	44	3	16
Reeves College - Edmonton	24	0	0	24	8	16	6	1	6	1	2
Reeves College - Lloydminster	84	3	0	84	20	64	4	6	38	2	14

Table 2: Definition of Disposition Categories

	Disposition Category	Details
A	Not in service	Phone number provided is not a valid phone number
	Fax	Interviewer or dialer heard fax line noise during call
	Invalid #/Wrong #	Phone number is a Business number, not the number to reach the respondent at, etc. *In the three above case, all records would have been put into the lookup file, and if a correct phone number for the student was never found they would have one of these codes as their final disposition
B	Busy	A minimum of 10 call attempts were made for each student record before classifying the # as unreachable
	Answering machine	
	No answer	
	Language barrier	Unable to reach student due to a language barrier with someone at the household (using phone number on record)
	Ill/Incapable	Student was/would be sick for the duration of the study and unable to complete the survey
C	Household/Company Refusal	Someone else in the household (not student) said the student was not interested in conducting the survey, asked us to not call back, or refused to provide up to date contact information
	Respondent Refusal	Spoke to student, they refused to participate in the study
	Qualified Termination	Found student and began interview, but the student chose to not complete the rest of the study or terminated partway through
D	Transferred to another study #	Referred to a different study and attempts to reach student never resulted in a completed interview. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respondent no longer lives in the household, email address was provided but student did not complete study online or respond to callback • Respondent wanted to do the survey online but never did and did not respond to callback • Respondent no longer lives in the household, new domestic phone number was provided but an interview was never completed despite attempts • Respondent no longer lives in the household, new international phone number was provided but an interview was never completed despite attempts
E	General/Specific callback	Callbacks that were scheduled/attempted but did not result in an interview

Response Rates

Harris/Decima completed a total of 124 surveys with graduates from the four participating private institutions. A total of 114 surveys were completed by telephone and 10 were completed online. The final sample of 124 represents a completion rate of 15%, based on the total number of sample records we obtained from the institutions (824 records). Furthermore, we have an overall response rate of 20%¹. The table below outlines these figures in greater detail.

Completion Table 1: Private Institution Completes by Institution and Completion Mode

PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS					
Completions as of: April 30, 2010 (FINAL)					
	Phone	Online	Total	Pop.	% complete
Total	114	10	124	824	15%
By Institution					
Academy of Learning (ALL)	45	5	50	307	16%
Academy of Learning - Calgary NE	7	0	7	29	24%
Academy of Learning - Edmonton Downtown	10	2	12	81	15%
Academy of Learning - Edmonton South	2	1	3	38	8%
Academy of Learning - West Edmonton Mall	9	1	10	63	16%
Academy of Learning - Medicine Hat	9	0	9	30	30%
Academy of Learning - Red Deer	8	1	9	66	14%
Columbia College	21	2	23	150	15%
Marvel College (ALL)	32	3	35	259	14%
Marvel College - Calgary	10	2	12	80	15%
Marvel College - Edmonton	16	1	17	103	17%
Marvel College - Red Deer	6	0	6	76	8%
Reeves College (ALL)	16	0	16	108	15%
Reeves College - Edmonton	2	0	2	24	8%
Reeves College - Lloydminster	14	0	14	84	17%

* Private institution sample files did not include CIPC codes to classify programs of study. As such, all cases were and were all treated as Learner Funded Designed Only (LFDO)

Conducting this graduate outcome survey with graduates from private institutions was a pilot project, and as such, no specific target completion rates were set.

¹ The response rate is calculated by dividing the number of completions by the total usable sample (124/617=20%)