

**Alberta Enterprise and Advanced Education
Alberta Graduate Outcomes Survey
Class of 2009-2010: Highlights Report**

- Final Report -

October 30th, 2012



ALBERTA ENTERPRISE AND ADVANCED EDUCATION CATALOGUING IN PUBLICATION DATA

Alberta graduate outcomes survey class of 2009-10: highlights report.

ISBN 978-1-4601-0398-2 (online)

1. College graduates – Alberta – Statistics.
2. College graduates – Employment – Alberta – Statistics.
3. College graduates – Alberta – Finance, Personal – Statistics.
 - I. Alberta. Alberta Enterprise and Advanced Education.

LB2430.C2 A333 2012

378.71

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1. BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

In Fall 2011, Alberta Enterprise and Advanced Education (EAE) contracted Leger Marketing Alberta Inc. to conduct the Graduate Outcomes Survey with Fall 2009 and Spring 2010 graduates of parchment and non-credit designated programs from Alberta's publicly funded post-secondary institutions. The findings from this study will help inform EAE and institutional planning, and are used in results reporting.

The specific objectives of the study are to:

- ✓ Assess graduates' satisfaction with their post-secondary experiences and outcomes approximately two years after graduation;
- ✓ Quantify and describe employment related outcomes and fit between any employment achieved and the graduates' program of study;
- ✓ Assess graduates' satisfaction with their overall educational experience, specific aspects of their experience, and outcomes;
- ✓ Understand how students select their program of study and their sources of information;
- ✓ Ascertain how students finance their education;
- ✓ Identify personal goals for post-secondary education and the extent to which graduates perceive those goals to have been achieved;
- ✓ Determine the propensity of graduates to recommend the institution program of study they attended to others;
- ✓ Understand the demographic profile of graduates in each program and field of study;
- ✓ Assess the ease of transferring credits to a university from another institution (reported in a separate Transfer Report);
- ✓ Understand the prevalence of applications for prior learning assessment (PLAR) and the degree of success in being awarded credits;
- ✓ Explore the effectiveness of post-secondary programs in preparing graduates for entry into the labour market;
- ✓ Assess the extent to which graduates incorporate lifelong learning into their lives; and

- ✓ Compare research findings with Graduate Outcomes Surveys from previous years.

A total of 25 publicly funded post-secondary institutions participated in this research as follows:

Comprehensive Academic & Research Institutions

Athabasca University
University of Alberta
University of Calgary
The University of Lethbridge

Comprehensive Community Institutions

Bow Valley College
Grande Prairie Regional College
Keyano College
Lakeland College
Lethbridge College
Medicine Hat College
NorQuest College
Northern Lakes College
Olds College
Portage College
Red Deer College

Baccalaureate & Applied Studies Institutions

Grant MacEwan University
Mount Royal University

Polytechnical Institutions

Northern Alberta Institute of Technology
Southern Alberta Institute of Technology

Independent Academic Institutions

Ambrose University College
Canadian University College
Concordia University College of Alberta
The King's University College
St. Mary's University College

Specialized Arts and Culture Institutions

Alberta College of Art and Design

The target participants for this study are all 2009-2010 graduates from publicly-funded credit programs and non-credit designated programs in Alberta. A census was required for all institutions with less than 1,000 graduates, and a census was also conducted with graduates of larger institutions to ensure that institution, program and sector requirements were all met.

Leger Marketing developed a detailed sampling plan to achieve survey accuracy targets defined by EAE by institution, field of study and program.

Leger Marketing and EAE conducted research with graduates of post-secondary programs approximately two years after they completed studies. Graduates were offered the option to complete a telephone survey or Internet survey based on their preference.

The questionnaire consists mainly of questions used in previous iterations of the Alberta Graduate Outcomes Survey, with some new questions.

Leger Marketing completed a total of 12,945 surveys with graduates from publicly funded institutions.

- ✓ 8,756 surveys were completed by telephone
- ✓ 4,189 surveys were completed online

The final sample of 12,945 represents a completion rate of 36% based on the number of sample records obtained from institutions from the graduates population of 36,215.

A census approach was used, meaning that all graduates were invited to participate rather than a random sample. Margin of error refers to the measurable sampling error that occurs when a random sample is used to estimate results of a population, and is not applicable to a census. If the same number of interviews had been completed using a random sample of graduates rather than a census, the margin of error would be ± 0.8 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

This report is divided into seven sections:

- ✓ Demographics
- ✓ Satisfaction
- ✓ Financing
- ✓ Transitions
- ✓ Outcomes
- ✓ Non-credit designated programs
- ✓ Historic

To aid in interpretation of findings, it is noted that responses of “don’t know” and “no response” were removed from the analysis such that all percentages are calculated from the population that provided a response to the question.

2. DEMOGRAPHICS

The demographic profile of the graduates who participated in this survey is as follows:

- Nearly all (97%) of Alberta graduates have completed high school before entering their post-secondary studies.
- A majority (68%) of graduates from Alberta post-secondary programs went to high school in the province, with just over two-in-five (43%) from urban Alberta and a quarter (25%) from elsewhere in Alberta (rural Alberta).
- One-in-five (20%) graduates last attended high school in another Canadian province or territory, while one-in-ten (11%) attended high school outside of Canada.
- Two-in-five (41%) indicate that either one of their parents completed a Bachelor degree or higher academic credential.
- Over a quarter (28%) of graduates indicate that at least one of their parents completed a high school education or less, and an equal to the percentage completed college and some post-secondary (28%). The group studied consisted of a higher proportion of female graduates (60%) from Alberta institutions than male graduates (40%).
- The majority of graduates (60%) are female and 40% are male. Females outnumber males in almost all institutional sectors, program types and fields of study, while males outnumber females in Polytechnical institutions, Doctoral degree programs, Trades and Technology, and Physical, Natural and Applied Sciences.
- The average age of Alberta graduates from the Class of 2009-10 is 29.5 years old.
- Nearly three-quarters (73%) of Alberta graduates were single when they started their post-secondary education, a quarter (25%) were married or common law status, and 2% were divorced, separated or widowed.
- The majority (80%) of graduates did not have any dependents when entering into their post-secondary institution, while less than one-in-ten of graduates had one (8%), two (7%), or three or more (5%) dependents.
- Overall, 4% of Alberta graduates consider themselves to be an Aboriginal person. Nearly two fifths (39%) of these Aboriginal graduates report being status Indians and 11% are non-status Indians, 2% are Inuit and over two-in-five (45%) are Metis.
- Nearly one-in-five (17%) of 2009-10 graduates consider themselves a member of a visible minority.
- Two percent (2%) of Alberta graduates report having disabilities.

3. SATISFACTION

Alberta graduates tend to feel that the program from which they graduated at their respective institution gave them all the potential benefits they were asked about to some positive extent (ratings of 4 or 5), reflecting positively on publicly funded institutions and their programs.

- A large majority of graduates feel that their program provided them with an opportunity to improve themselves to some positive extent (85% 4-5); this is the highest ranking of the potential benefits asked about. Following closely, 83% of graduates feel that their program provided them with knowledge of a particular field of study to some positive extent (4-5 rating).
- About three quarters of graduates feel that their program gave them a desire to continue learning more about the subject or other subjects (79% 4-5 rating), and that they gained improved employment opportunities (71% 4-5 rating).

Alberta graduates tend to feel that their program has added to their skills, knowledge and abilities to a positive extent.

- Reflecting on their educational experience, over three quarters of graduates feel that it helped them to learn independently (78% 4-5 rating), work independently (78% 4-5 rating), and analyze information (77% 4-5 rating).

A high majority of graduates are satisfied with the overall quality of their educational experience (92%), including almost half (45%) who are very satisfied. A high majority of graduates are satisfied with the overall quality with the quality of teaching in their program (90%), including almost half (42%) who are very satisfied.

The majority of graduates would recommend both the institution they attended and the program they completed (94% and 87% respectively).

A large majority (86%) of graduates believe that the financial investment in their post-secondary studies was worth it for the benefits gained.

A small group of graduates (6%) participated in a study abroad program outside of Canada. The majority of study abroad programs were offered in English (66% all in English and an additional 18% primarily in English). Virtually all (94%) study abroad participants are satisfied with their educational experience, including 69% who are very satisfied.

4. FINANCING

Most graduates worked while taking classes at an Alberta institution, and many also relied on financial aid from the government and/or non-government sources.

Nearly three-quarters (72%) of graduates worked while taking classes at an Alberta post-secondary institution. Particularly high percentages of graduates worked while enrolled in Baccalaureate and Applied Studies Institutions (81%), Master's Degree (81%) programs, and Languages Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities (82%), Business (80%) and Education (80%) fields of study.

- Over half (54%) of graduates used some form of borrowing to finance their post-secondary education. Among those with this student financing, their average total debt at the time of graduation is \$20,131.
- Their median total debt was \$14,000.

Nearly two-in-five (39%) graduates have received a government sponsored student loan.

- On average, Alberta graduates of 2009-10 who received a government sponsored student loan owed \$18,884.
- Greater average loan values are reported among graduates of Applied and Bachelor Degree, Master's Degree, and Doctoral Degree programs. Also, graduates aged 26 to 30 years, and those who are single, typically owed more in government-sponsored student loans.

Over a quarter (29%) of graduates received some form of non-government financing for education-related expenses during their time at post-secondary studies.

- Among graduates who attained non-government sources of funding, the average amount owed in these loans is \$12,813.
- Over two-thirds (68%) of graduates received scholarships, grants or bursaries during their studies at Alberta post-secondary institutions.
- The average amount received by those graduates who received a scholarship, grant or bursary is \$9,475, with (53%) receiving less than \$4,000, and half receiving more.

5. TRANSITIONS

Half of graduates (51%) entered post-secondary studies right after graduating high school (0 years in between). Seventeen percent (17%) waited one year, 10% two years, and 9% 3-5 years. The remainder (12%) entered their program more than five years after high school. Those graduates who did not begin their post-secondary studies immediately following high school graduation, but waited for six years or more, are more commonly found among females and those who were married or common law.

Graduates were presented with a variety of sources of information they may have consulted when choosing their program and institution, then they rated the value of the information sources they personally used. Individual institution websites were rated more valuable than other information sources (mean score of 3.8 out of 5) among users.

Nearly half (45%) of graduates completed some post-secondary courses, not including upgrading, prior to enrolling at an Alberta post-secondary institution.

Nine percent (9%) of graduates applied for prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) when enrolling at an Alberta post-secondary institution.

- One third (33%) of graduates who completed PLAR indicated that they completed a written exam, while nearly a quarter indicated that they completed a skills demonstration or assessment (23%), or portfolio assessment (22%).
- Over three quarters (77%) of graduates who applied for PLAR were successful in obtaining the credits they had hoped to achieve.

Although most graduates took classes the traditional way (70%) during their studies at Alberta post-secondary institutions, online or distance courses were taken by a number of students (30%) in various programs.

After graduation, not all students entered the workforce. Just over a quarter (27%) of 2009-10 graduates enrolled as students to further their education experience. A relatively high percentage of graduates who studied at Baccalaureate and Applied Studies (35%) and Independent Academic (37%) Institutions re-entered the education system compared to graduates from other sectors (a range of 13%-28%). Applied and Bachelor Degree (30%) and Diploma (29%) graduates are also more likely to be currently enrolled as students, when compared to Certificate (23%), Master's Degree (20%), and Doctoral Degree (6%) graduates, as are those graduates who studied either Business (34%) or Languages, Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities (35%), when

compared to graduates of all other fields of study (a range of 11%-30%), except Recreation. Of all the graduates currently enrolled as a student, two-thirds (66%) are full-time and one-third (34%) are part-time.

Half (50%) of graduates currently enrolled as a student are working towards either a graduate degree (25%) or undergraduate degree (25%), while 5% are enrolled in applied degree programs, 6% are pursuing professional school credentials (e.g., medicine, law) and the remaining two in five (39%) are enrolled in other kinds of programs.

Over a quarter (27%) of graduates have permanently relocated to a different city or town since completing their post-secondary studies. Just over two fifths (43%) of Alberta graduates who relocated after graduation moved to an urban Alberta area location, while the rest moved to other regions. One-in-five (20%) moved back to their hometown after graduation.

6. OUTCOMES

Nearly two-thirds (63%) of Alberta graduates had the primary goal of completing their program when they entered their post-secondary field of study, followed by fifteen percent (15%) who wished to attain employment.

Over three-quarters (79%) of graduates fully achieved their goal(s) upon completion of their studies. Of those graduates who did not achieve their primary goal upon graduation, just over a quarter (27%) indicate changing their program, career plans or goals as their primary reason. This was followed by a fifth (19%) who re-entered the post-secondary system to further pursue their academic goals.

Currently, the majority (87%) of graduates have a paying job and, of those who have a paying job, eight percent (8%) of them are self-employed. Of those graduates who do not have paid employment, slightly over two-in-five (42%) are actively looking for employment.

- The median salary for 2009-10 graduates with at least one paying job was \$50,000.
- The majority of 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 (61%), with another quarter (27%) saying they were somewhat related. Subject-area knowledge acquired in school was also seen as quite applicable to their jobs (56% very related).
- One-third (33%) of graduates who are working indicate that when they were selected for their current main job the minimum level of education needed to successfully get the job was a Bachelor's Degree.
- After graduation, and entering the workforce, the majority of employed graduates felt that they were qualified to some fuller extent to undertake their new position in the workforce; with just over three-in-five (62%) feeling they were qualified (i.e. not under or overqualified).
- All things considered, Alberta graduates who are currently employed are satisfied overall with their present job, with satisfaction being fairly split between those who are satisfied (48%) and those very satisfied (42%).

7. NON-CREDIT DESIGNATED PROGRAMS

Fifty-five (55) graduates of non-credit designated programs participated in the study.

- Just over two-thirds (69%) of graduates from non-credit designated programs are female and nearly one-third (31%) are male, similar to parchment programs.
- Graduates of non-credit designated programs are shown to be younger, based on the percentage of graduates that are 22 years of age or younger (30%), when compared to parchment program graduates (12%).
- The majority of non-credit designated program graduates were single (53%) upon entering their post-secondary studies.
- Graduates of non-credit designated programs had a primary goal upon entering post-secondary to complete their specific degree or diploma program (44%), followed by attaining employment (19%), consistent with parchment program graduates.
- Satisfaction with the quality of teaching and program is consistent among both non-credit and parchment designated program graduates.
- Graduates of both non-credit and parchment designated programs believe their program was worth the financial cost.
- Three-quarters (75%) of graduates from non-credit designated programs indicate that they worked while taking classes, similar to the proportion of parchment program graduates (72%) who indicate the same.
- Two years after graduation, just over four-in-five (84%) non-credit designated program graduates are employed, which is similar to parchment program graduates (77%).
- Overall, graduates from non-credit designated programs feel that their current main job is very related (74%) to the program from which they graduated.
- Non-credit designated program graduate satisfaction with their current main job exceeds that of parchment graduates.
- A greater proportion of non-credit designated program graduates feel that they are qualified (77%) for their current main job, when compared to parchment program graduates (62%).

8. HISTORIC

The following section highlights comparisons on specific variables for results of the classes of 2009-10, 2007-08, 2005-06, 2003-04 and 2001-02.

- Employment rates, as a percentage of the active labour force of graduates, remain somewhat consistent since 2004, 95% or higher. The lowest rate is found in 2007-08 with 95%, and it increased to 96% in 2009-10, matching that of 2001-02.
- An increase in employment is seen when looking at the total graduate population and their labour force status, with 87% being employed, up from 85% for the class of 2007-08. There is a corresponding decrease in those who are not employed but currently enrolled as full time students: 8% for the class of 2009-10, down from 9% for the class of 2007-08.
- The increase in the percentage of employed graduates is relatively consistent across each program type, with an increase of one percentage point within each program except for Doctoral Degree graduates where there is a decrease of three percentage points. The same general trends are found among fields of study.

The median salary for 2009-10 graduates with at least one paying job is \$50,000. This is a decrease from the median salary of \$53,370 reported in 2007-08, when adjusted by the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

- This decrease in salary is seen across most program types (except certificate, which increased) and all fields of study.

The percentage of graduates who used loans to finance their post-secondary education continues to decline in 2009-10 from 2003-04. The proportion of graduates who incurred government sponsored loans also continues to decline in 2009-10 from 2001-02, as does the proportion of graduates who incurred non-government sponsored loans, from 2005-06.

Median student debt values have increased slightly in 2009-10 to \$14,000 from \$12,000 2007-08 following a steady decline since 2003-04.

- Government sponsored loans are unchanged in average value from 2007-08, while the average value of non-government loans increased, following two consecutive periods of decline.