

# DEGREE PROGRAMS



DETC

GRADUATES AND EMPLOYERS  
EVALUATE THEIR WORTH

Conducted by the  
Distance Education  
and Training Council

2001

## Foreword

In July 2001 the Distance Education and Training Council surveyed graduates of 21 DETC-accredited degree-granting institutions. Members were asked to submit a random sample of 100 names of graduates from their degree programs.<sup>1</sup> The degrees awarded ranged from the Associates through the Master's degree levels.

The Accrediting Commission of the Distance Education and Training Council accredited its first academic degree offered by correspondence/distance study in January 1979. In 1983 the DETC conducted its first survey of graduates and their employers and reported the results in a report entitled, "Accredited Home Study Degrees: Graduates and Employers Evaluate Their Worth." The survey was conducted again in 1994 and published in a report entitled, "Accredited Distance Study Degrees: Graduates and Employers Evaluate Their Worth."

The purposes of these surveys were to obtain information on how DETC degree graduates felt about their distance study experience, how this degree had affected their careers or personal life, and how employers felt about individuals who had earned a degree through distance study.

More than 1,300 graduates and 80 employers were surveyed. The response rate was 18 percent on the graduate survey and 42 percent on the employer's survey. The results of these surveys certainly reflect favorably on accredited distance study degrees. The following information underscores the theme that DETC degrees are valuable, worthwhile credentials . . . particularly to the student and to his or her employer. The survey results are classic "outcomes" data that support the overall validity and reliability of DETC's accreditation standards.

This report provides positive testimony to the rigor, depth and worth of accredited degrees earned via distance education. It is important documentation showing that DETC accreditation standards are a trustworthy indicator of the quality of an institution. We invite you to study the data that follow.

<sup>1</sup> Some institutions provided fewer than 100 names. Rather, they submitted the names of all graduates to date.

## Survey Method

The DETC asked 21 of its accredited degree-granting institutions to submit the names and addresses of a random sampling of graduates from the degree program(s). In all, 1,353 names were submitted. In July 2001, a survey with a return envelope was mailed to each of the names.

A total of 1,353 surveys were mailed world-wide (316 to foreign countries and 18 to Canada) A total of 100 envelopes were returned as “undeliverable.” A total of 226 responses were returned to DETC, making the response rate 18 percent. This percent is considered good in mail surveys of this type, since the surveys were anonymous and there were no follow-up mailings to the non-respondents.

A second survey of the graduates’ supervisors was mailed. Eighty graduates gave permission for DETC to survey their supervisors. Thirty-three supervisors responded to the survey, giving an excellent response rate of 42 percent.

## Survey Summary

According to the results of the 2001 survey, graduates of academic degree programs offered by accredited DETC member institutions the following emerged:

1. The largest percentage (22%) are ages 41-45, and the largest percentage (17%) make \$51-\$61,000 per year.
2. Twenty-five percent of the degrees awarded are at the Associate degree level; 36% are Bachelor degrees; and 39% are Master’s degrees. It took an average of 3.3 years to earn a degree.
3. Graduates selected the distance study method because it was the most convenient way for them (33%) to earn a degree. Other reasons given for electing to study by distance education were: work schedule (27%), family constraints (12%), study at your own pace (8%), costs less (6%), and unable to take courses at a traditional colleges or university (6%).

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4. Sixty-four percent earned their distance study degree by using the paper-based method; 32% used online and paper-based; and 4% used the online method.
5. Ninety-seven percent said that the information they received before enrolling accurately described the degree program.
6. Ninety-eight percent said that they received appropriate information about policies, procedures, support services and costs for the program.
7. Ninety-eight percent said that their experience with the degree program matched their expectations.
8. Ninety-seven percent thought that the course material was sufficiently comprehensive to satisfy their learning goals (2% were unsure).
9. When asked, "Compared to classroom education you have had, what do you think about the level of difficulty and the challenge of this degree program?" 94% said that it was same or more difficult.
10. Ninety-six percent said that they felt challenged by the level of difficulty of the course(s).
11. When asked to rate the depth of knowledge and teaching competence of the faculty, 99% rated it adequate or superior.
12. Ninety-nine percent said that the faculty reflected an adequate understanding of the course materials.
13. When asked, "Was there sufficient communication with the instructor to meet your goals?" 85% said "Yes," and 6% were unsure.
14. Ninety-four percent found the examinations and assigned projects to adequately test their understanding of the subject.
15. Ninety-eight percent rated their overall satisfaction with the instruction services as adequate or superior.

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16. Ninety-six percent rated their access to other learning resources that they needed to complete the program as adequate or superior.
17. The majority (74%) rated “personal satisfaction” as their number one reason for enrolling in the degree program. Other important reasons were “to learn more about the subject” and “to improve job skills.” The least important reason was “to qualify for a professional license.”
18. The majority (78%) rated “personal satisfaction” as most important benefit they received from obtaining their degree, and “the enjoyment of learning” as the second most selected benefit. The least important benefit was “to qualify for a professional license.”
19. Ninety-nine percent said that they thought the degree program was adequate or superior in providing them with the knowledge, skills, and education they were seeking.
20. Ninety-five percent said that they thought the degree they earned was worth the effort required (3% weren’t sure).
21. Fifty-four percent received an increase in their income due to earning their degree.
22. Fifty percent had a job promotion or change in careers that improved their life as a result of earning their degree.
23. The majority (67%) did not try to transfer their credits to another academic institutions. Twenty-one percent were able to have their degree or credits transfer to another institution.
24. Ninety-nine percent rated their satisfaction with the degree programs as adequate or superior.
25. Ninety-two percent said that they would recommend the degree program to a friend.

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26. Seventy-five percent said that they would enroll in another distance education degree program (19% weren't sure).
27. The most common "strong points" given concerning their experience with the distance study method were:
  - Flexibility, convenience
  - Great curriculum
  - Able to study at your own pace
  - Availability and affordability
  - Challenging assignments
  - Excellent curriculum
  - Less bias on instructor's part
  - Helps to improve study skills
  - Demands discipline
  - Easier to do research
28. The most common "weak points" given concerning their experience with the distance study method were:
  - Miss face-to-face contact with instructors and students
  - Lack of peer experiences and group discussions
  - Delayed feedback
  - Time delays (mail)
  - Lack of deadlines
  - Lack of motivation
  - Lack of acceptance by other institutions

## Supervisor Survey Results

In a separate survey of the graduates' supervisors (35% elected to have their supervisors surveyed by DETC; 42% of the supervisors responded), the following emerged:

1. Ninety-one percent of the supervisors knew that this person had earned an academic degree by distance education.
2. Ninety-one percent of the supervisors thought that the graduate they supervised compared favorably in knowledge, skills and attitude with with subordinates with resident degrees.
3. When asked, "Do you think that this person performs better on the job because of the degree earned?" 91% said "Yes."
4. Eighty-four percent said that they would be inclined to hire or supervise other employees who have earned their degrees by distance education.
5. When asked, "Would you encourage others such as subordinates or colleagues to enroll in accredited distance education degree programs to increase their job competence?" 94% said "Yes."
6. When asked to rate the value of the degree earned by their employee compared to a resident school degree in the same field, 69% rated the degree "just as valuable" or "more valuable."
7. Are there any other comments you would like to share?
  - Excellent alternative to resident schools.
  - I support continuing education as a pathway towards personnel growth and career enhancement.
  - Some degrees are better suited for distance education. One large drawback to distance education is the lack of interpersonal group discussion.
  - Pursuing an advanced degree whether in residence or through distance learning while working full time requires considerable time and effort. This student did a great job while doing both.

## Response Rate by Institution

Institution	Surveys Mailed <sup>1</sup>	Surveys Received	Response Rate
American Academy of Nutrition	8	2	25%
American College of Computer & Info. Sciences	98	17	17%
American College of Prehospital Medicine	68	28	42%
American Graduate University	6	1	17%
American Military University	92	14	15%
Andrew Jackson University	13	1	8%
Atlantic University	33	14	42%
California College for Health Sciences	91	13	14%
CA National University for Advanced Studies	23	9	39%
Catholic Distance University	7	4	57%
Cleveland Institute of Electronics	89	19	21%
College for Financial Planning	65	7	11%
Global University	90	12	13%
Grantham College of Engineering	50	10	20%
Griggs University	93	7	8%
Harcourt Learning Direct/ICS	92	12	13%
International Management Centres	99	5	5%
ISIM University	61	15	25%
Paralegal Institute	58	12	21%
University of St. Augustine for Health Sciences	32	7	22%
World College	85	17	20%

Number of Institutions Participating: 21

Total Surveys Mailed: 1,353 - 100 Undeliverable = 1,253

Total Surveys Received: 226

Response Rate: 18%

<sup>1</sup> Minus the undeliverable surveys.

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### Comparison

Below is a comparison of similar questions from the 1994 survey and the 2001 survey. It shows that compared to the 1994 graduate, the average degree earner in 2001 is older, earns more money, attains a higher degree, and is just as satisfied with the degree program:

		1994	2001
Number of Institutions surveyed		10	21
Number of surveys mailed		674	1,353
Response Rate		24%	18%
Largest percentage of:	Age 26-30	34%	9%
	Age 31-35	14%	12%
	Age 36-40	20%	19%
	Age 41-45	14%	22%
	Age 46-50	9%	12%
Largest percent of Income (in thousands)	\$21-30,000	11%	6%
	\$31-40	12%	15%
	\$41-50	8%	13%
	\$51-60	6%	17%
	\$61 and above	3%	7%
Institutions awarding:			
- associate degrees		71%	21%
- bachelor degrees		18%	36%
- master's degrees		11%	39%
Average time to earn degree:			
- associate		3%	3%
- bachelor's		4%	4%
- master's		2%	3%

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	1994	2001
Reasons for taking earning distance education degree		
- convenience	36%	33%
- work schedule	33%	27%
- family constraints	12%	12%
- study at your own pace	10%	8%
- costs less	6%	6%
- availability	3%	11%
- other	0%	3%
 Course material was sufficiently comprehensive	 94%	 97%
Same or more difficult when compared to classroom to classroom education	89%	94%
Felt challenged by level of difficulty	99%	96%
Knowledge and teaching competence of faculty	98%	99%
Faculty reflected adequate understanding of material	98%	99%
Examinations and projects adequately tests	98%	94%
Overall satisfaction with instructional services as adequate or better	95%	98%
Reasons for enrolling (high)		
- personal satisfaction	77%	74%
- improve job skills	65%	46%
- learn more about subject	76%	58%
- obtain credentials	57%	37%
- earn more money	22%	22%
- get a promotion	22%	27%
- prepare for a new job	32%	28%
- qualify for professional license	32%	18%

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	1994	2001
Benefits from obtaining degree (high)		
- personal satisfaction	79%	78%
- proper credentials	47%	40%
- enjoyment of learning	65%	44%
- improve job skills	62%	32%
- qualify for professional license	31%	14%
- job promotion	37%	22%
- increase in income	23%	22%
- access to higher degree	45%	41%
Rated extent degree provided knowledge, skills and education they were seeking adequate or better	95%	99%
Said degree was worth the effort	96%	95%
Had increase in income due to degree	37%	54%
Had job promotion or change in careers	38%	50%
Overall rating of degree program as adequate or better	99%	99%

## Comparison of Supervisor Survey

Supervisors—	1994	2001
Knew that student earned degree through distance education	84%	91%
Said graduate compared favorable with resident-school	94%	91%
Said graduate performs better on job	81%	91%
Would hire other graduates of distance education programs	92%	84%
Would encourage others to enroll in distance education programs	97%	94%
Rate value of degree as compared to resident degree:		
- more valuable	14%	13%
- just as valuable	70%	56%
- less valuable	5%	13%
- not sure	11%	18%

## Final Results of the 2001 Graduate Survey

Institutions Participating: 21

Number of Surveys Mailed: 1,353 – 100 (undeliverable) = 1,252 (316 Foreign/18 Canada)

Total Received and Counted: 226 (18% Return)

Number of Employers Surveyed: 80 - 1 (undeliverable) = 79    Number Received: 33 (42% Return)

Age: (in percentages)

Annual Income (in thousands):

0	18 – 20	12%	46-50	5%	\$10-20	7%	\$71-80
3%	21 – 25	9%	51-55	6%	\$21-30	6%	\$81-90
9%	26 – 30	9%	56-60	15%	\$31-40	4%	\$91-100
12%	31 – 35	3%	61-65	13%	\$41-50	2%	\$101-110
19%	36 – 40	1%	66-70	17%	\$51-60	0%	111-120
22%	41 – 45	1%	71+	17%	\$61-70	8%	\$120+

1. What academic degree did you earn from this institution?

25% = Associate Degrees    36% = Bachelor Degrees    39% = Master's

2. How long did it take you to earn your degree?    AVERAGE: 3.3 Years

Associate Degrees = 3 years

Bachelor Degrees = 4 years

Master's Degree = 3 years

3. Why did you elect to study by the distance education method?

33% = Convenience

27% = Work Schedule

12 % = Family Constraints

8% = Study at own pace

6% = Costs less

11% = Availability

3% = Other

4. Was this program offered: 4% = online    64% = paper-based    32% = both

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5. Did the information you received before enrolling accurately describe the degree program?  
Yes = 97%      No = 2%      Unsure = 1%
6. Did you receive appropriate information about policies, procedures, support services, and costs for the program?  
Yes = 98%      No = 1%      Unsure = 1%
7. Did your experience with the degree program match your expectations?  
Yes = 92%      No = 4%      Unsure = 4%
8. Did you think the course material was sufficiently comprehensive to satisfy your learning goals?  
Yes = 97%      No = 1%      Unsure = 2%
9. Compared to "classroom education" you have had, what do you think about the level of difficulty and the challenge of this degree program?  
more difficult = 41%      less difficult = 5%  
comparable = 52%      unable to compare the two = 1%
10. Were you challenged by the level of difficulty of the course(s)?  
always = 49%      sometimes = 47%      not usually = 4%
11. How would you rate the depth of knowledge and teaching competence of the faculty?  
superior = 52%      inadequate = 1%  
adequate = 47%      very inadequate = 0%
12. Did assistance you received from faculty reflect an adequate understanding of the course materials?  
always = 81%      sometimes = 18%      not usually = 1%

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13. Was there sufficient communication with the instructor to meet your needs?

Yes = 85%                      No = 9%                      Unsure = 6%

14. Did you find the examinations and assigned projects to adequately test your understanding of the subject?

in most cases = 94%              sometimes = 6%              not usually = 0%

15. Overall, how would you rate your satisfaction with the instructional services offered by the institution?

superior = 59%                      inadequate = 2%  
adequate = 39%                      very inadequate = 0%

16. How would you rate your access to other learning resources that you needed to complete the program?

superior = 39%                      inadequate = 4%  
adequate = 57%                      very inadequate = 0%

17. How would you rate the following as your objective for enrolling in the degree program?

	LOW			HIGH	
	1	2	3	4	5
(in percentages)					
earn more money	18	13	24	23	22
get a promotion	21	12	23	17	27
prepare for new job	19	11	18	24	28
improve job skills	9	7	12	26	46
qualify for professional license	37	13	20	12	18
obtain credential	18	12	12	21	37
personal satisfaction	3	1	4	18	74
learn more about subject	3	3	11	25	58

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18. How would you rate the following as ways you benefited from obtaining this degree?

	LOW				HIGH
	1	2	3	4	5
(in percentages)					
personal satisfaction	1	0	8	13	78
proper credentials	14	5	17	24	40
enjoyment of learning	2	5	14	35	44
improve job skills	6	8	16	38	32
qualify for professional license	37	12	23	14	14
job promotion	25	11	19	23	22
increase in income	23	12	18	25	22
access to higher degree	15	11	12	21	41

19. To what extent do you think this degree program provided the knowledge, skills, and education you were seeking?

superior = 53%                      inadequate = 1%  
adequate = 46%                      very inadequate = 0%

20. Was the degree you earned by distance education worth the effort required?

Yes = 95%                      No = 2%                      Not sure = 3%

21. Have you had an increase in income due to earning your degree?

Yes, a significant amount = 21%  
Yes, a modest amount = 33%  
No increase = 46%

22. Have you had a job promotion or change in careers that improved your life as a result of earning your degree?

Yes = 50%                      No = 50%

23. If you have tried to have your degree work accepted by other academic institutions, were you successful in getting acceptance of transfer credit?

Yes = 21%                      No = 12%                      Did not try to transfer work = 67%

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24. All things considered, how would you rate your satisfaction with the degree program?

superior = 59%                      inadequate = 1%  
adequate = 40%                      very inadequate = 0%

25. Would you recommend this degree program to a friend?

Yes = 92%                      No = 8%

26. Would you enroll in another degree program offered by distance study?

Yes = 75%                      No = 6%                      Not sure = 19%

27. List any strong points of the distance study method you experienced:

Examples:

- Flexibility, convenience
- Great curriculum
- Able to study at your own pace
- Availability and affordability
- Challenging assignments
- Excellent curriculum
- Less bias on instructor's part
- Helps to improve study skills
- Demands discipline
- Easier to do research

28. List any weak points of the distance education method you experienced:

Examples:

- Miss face-to-face contact with instructors and students
- Lack of peer experiences and group discussions
- Delayed feedback
- Time delays (mail)
- Lack of deadlines
- Lack of motivation
- Lack of acceptance by other institutions

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29. Do you have any other comments on your school, program, or the distance education method of learning?

Examples:

- If I had a choice, I would pick distance learnign 9 times out of 10.
- The school was extremely professional, study materials were of highest quality.
- I recommend that any working adult can achieve it and enhance culture and income.
- The program fit in with my work schedule and other activities. The courses were challenging and informative, yet fun.
- Great overall program, the college staff was very helpful. I am continuing toward a BS from this college.
- I felt isolated at times.
- It was a very exciting experience and I am proud of my degree.
- It's the way to go for certain disciplined and mature students.
- I was able to demonstrate sufficient knowledge to get hired and receive a huge increase in my income.

30. May we survey (by mail) your current supervisor/employer to obtain his or her opinion on your degree earned by distance education?

Yes = 35%

No = 65%

## Final Results of Supervisor Survey

Graduates who gave permission to survey their supervisor: 80

Number of Surveys Mailed: 80 – 1 (undeliverable) = 79

Number of Surveys Received: 33 (42% response rate)

1. Before receiving this letter, did you know that this person had earned an academic degree by distance education?  
Yes = 91%      No = 9%
2. Compared to other individuals you supervise or know who have earned "resident school" degrees of a comparable nature, does this person compare favorably in terms of equivalent knowledge, skills, and attitude?  
Yes = 91%      No = 9%
3. Do you think that this person performs better on the job because of the degree earned?  
Yes = 91%      No = 9%
4. Are you favorably inclined toward hiring or supervising other employees who have earned their degrees by distance education?  
Yes = 84%      No = 16%
5. Would you encourage others such as subordinates or colleagues to enroll in accredited distance education degree programs to increase their job competence?  
Yes = 94%      No = 6%
6. From your viewpoint as a supervisor, how do you rate the value of this person's academic degree compared to resident school degrees in the same field?  
More valuable = 13%  
Just as valuable = 56%  
Less valuable = 13%  
Not sure = 18%

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7. Are there any other comments you would like to share?

- Excellent alternative to resident schools.
- I support continuing education as a pathway towards personnel growth and career enhancement.
- Some degrees are better suited for distance education. One large drawback to distance education is the lack of interpersonal group discussion.
- Pursuing an advanced degree whether in residence or through distance learning while working full time requires considerable time and effort. This student did a great job while doing both.
- The concept of distance education is great—flexible, versatile.
- This student is as prepared as anyone who has been in a large university lecture hall . . . probably better.
- Outstanding professional development opportunity.

## About the DETC

The Distance Education and Training Council (DETC), a nonprofit, voluntary association of accredited distance study institutions, was founded in 1926 to promote sound educational standards and ethical business practices within the distance study field. The independent Accrediting Commission of the Distance Education and Training Council is listed by the United States Department of Education as a “nationally recognized accrediting agency.” The Accrediting Commission is also a charter member of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA).

DETC has emerged as a leader in global distance learning. DETC has accredited members in Canada, Ireland, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States. With its 75-plus years of history and its highly refined and federally recognized accreditation program, DETC offers distance learning institutions the most current, relevant and practical services for the 21st Century.

For more information about the Distance Education and Training Council and its accredited members, please visit the web site at [www.detc.org](http://www.detc.org).



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