

2003 BC College and Institute
Short Stay Pilot Survey

Short Stay Summary Report

Spring 2003

Summary Report from a Follow-Up
Survey of Former College, University
College, and Institute Students Who
Completed 9–23 Credits

OWG
Outcomes Working Group

 **BRITISH
COLUMBIA**
Ministry of Advanced Education

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Introduction

The 2003 BC College and Institute Short Stay Pilot Survey was designed to collect data on the outcomes of former students who leave public colleges, university colleges, and institutes after completing a relatively small number of courses. It is important to understand why these students are leaving their institutions early, since their behaviour may have implications for service and program delivery.

Short stay students have been defined as former college, university college and institute students who have completed between 9 and 23 credits and have left their institution.* The survey collected data on these former students' overall satisfaction with their institution, objectives for enrolling, reasons for leaving, employment outcomes, and further studies.

Six BC institutions volunteered to fund and participate in the survey. There were two university colleges: the University College of the Cariboo and Okanagan University College; two urban institutions: Douglas College and BC Institute of Technology; and two rural colleges: Selkirk College and North Island College.

Data for this report are from survey interviews conducted, by telephone, in February and March 2003. Out of 2,273 former students eligible for surveying, 871 completed the survey, making the gross response rate 38 percent.* (The restricted budget for the project limited the number of interviews that could be conducted.)

Characteristics of Short Stay Students

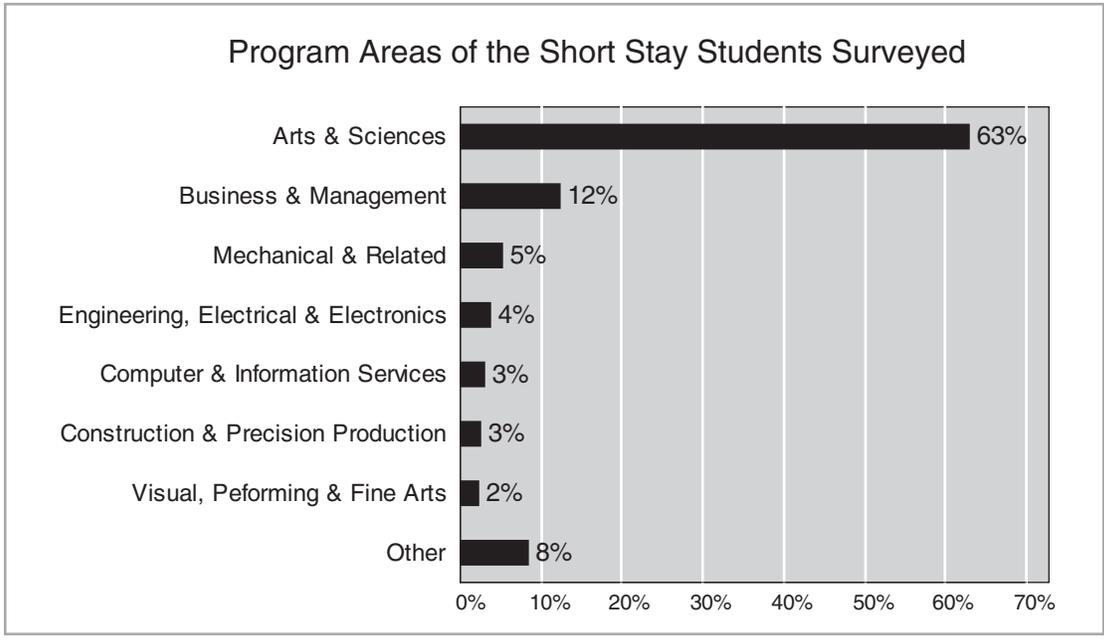
In the 2003 BC College and Institute Short Stay Pilot Survey, 56 percent of students surveyed identified themselves as female. Female respondents tended to be older than male respondents—the mean ages for females and males respectively were 26 and 24 with medians of 22 and 21. BCIT respondents were more likely to be male (75 percent).

The mean age of short stay students overall was 26 years, with a median age of 22, and a range of 18–63 years. North Island College respondents were older than other respondents with a median of 27.5 and a mean age of 31.

Student grade point averages (GPA) ranged from zero to four, with a mean of 2.35. Selkirk students had the highest average GPA (2.75) of all institutions.

The majority of short stay students were in “open enrolment” programs, with 63 percent in Arts and Sciences. Most of the respondents from Douglas College (91 percent) were in Arts and Sciences programs, as were 75 percent of Cariboo's respondents, 74 percent of Okanagan's, 73 percent of North Island's respondents, and 48 percent of Selkirk's—only 3 percent of short stay students from BCIT said they were in Arts and Sciences.

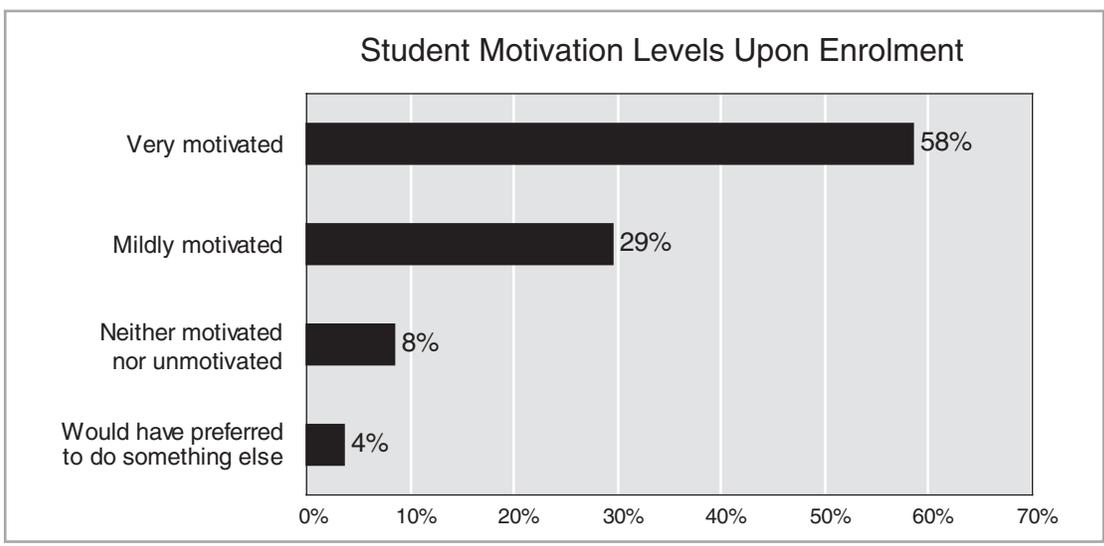
* Please see Appendix A for information on cohort selection and response rates.



Approximately 6 percent of respondents reported that they were concurrently enrolled at more than one post-secondary institution. Douglas College respondents were more likely than others to say they took courses at another institution while they were at Douglas: 12 percent were concurrently enrolled.

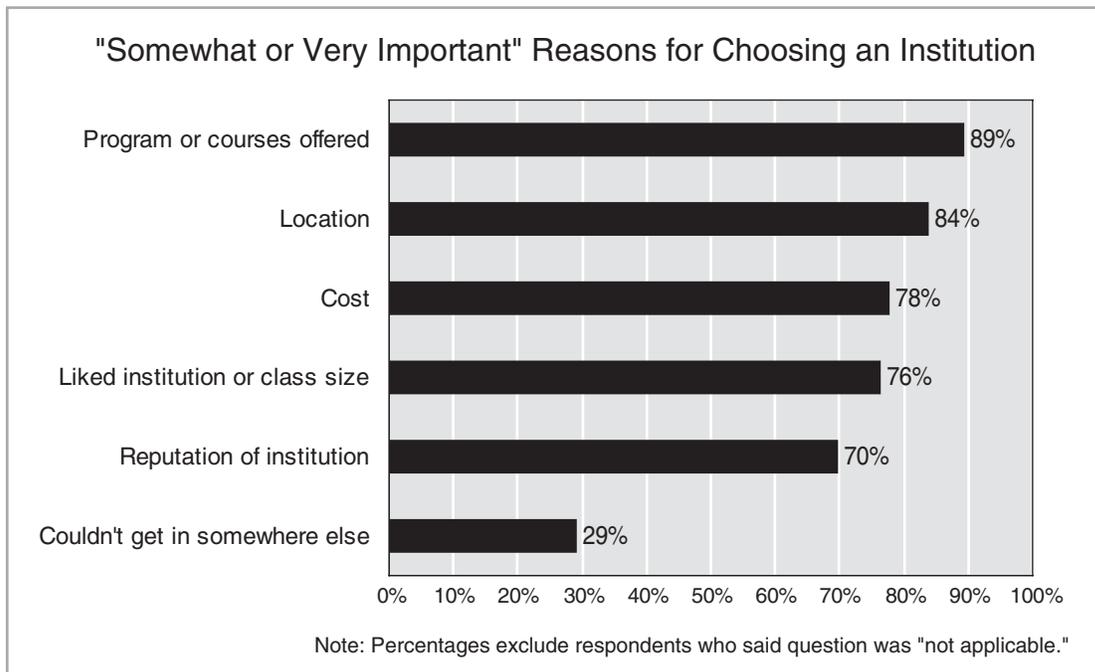
About one-third (34 percent) of respondents reported having had some prior post-secondary education: 13 percent previously attended a community college; 5 percent, a university college; 4 percent, an institute; and 9 percent had attended university.

The majority of survey respondents considered themselves to be “very motivated” about being a student when they first enrolled, while less than 4 percent indicated that they “would have preferred to do something else.” Respondents with higher GPAs (≥ 2.7) reported being more motivated when they first enrolled than did those with lower GPAs (≤ 2.69).

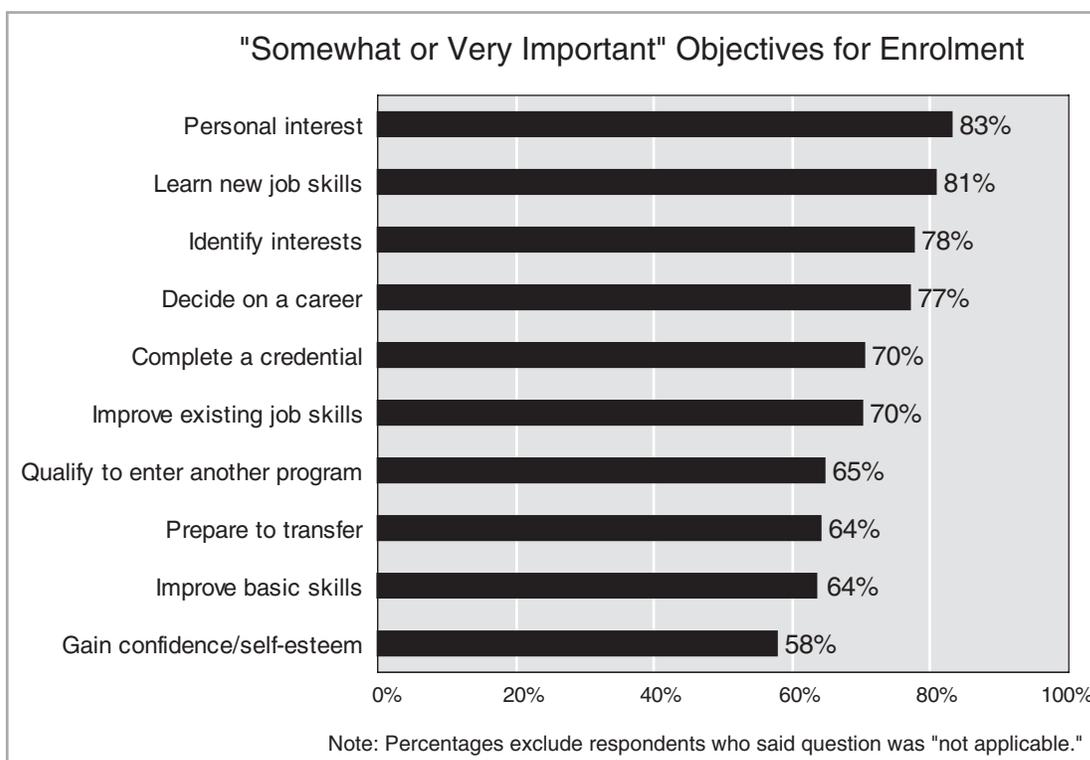


Why they Enrolled; Why they Left

For the short stay students surveyed, the most important factor in choosing an institution to attend was the program or courses offered—89 percent identified this as “somewhat or very important.” Location was also very influential: 84 percent of respondents said location was “somewhat or very important” in choosing their institution. Other prominent factors included cost, institution and class size, and reputation. Not being able to get in somewhere else was “not important” to 71 percent of respondents.



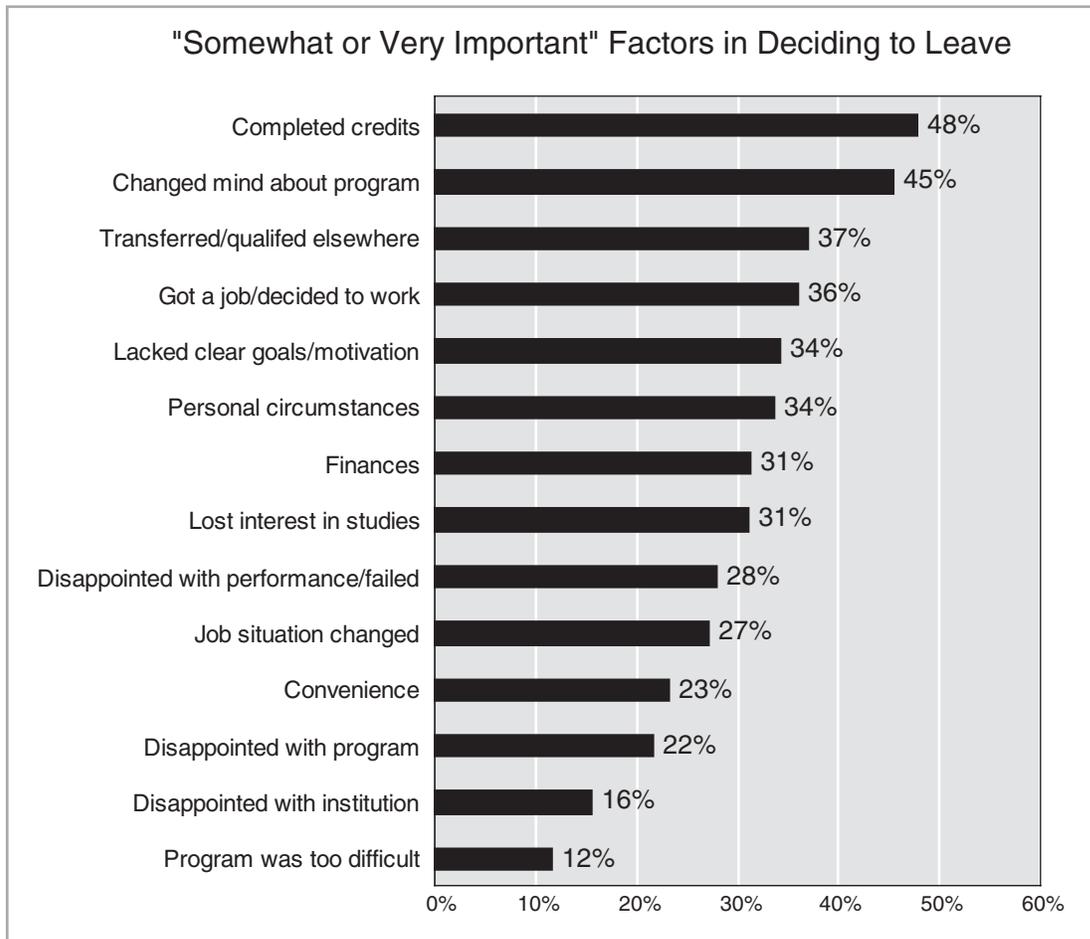
The top three objectives for enrolling, rated as “somewhat important or important,” were personal interest, to learn new job skills, and to identify interests. When they first enrolled, the vast majority of respondents (87 percent) reported that their reasons for enrolling were “somewhat or very clear” to them.



Also when they first enrolled, 82 percent of respondents were “somewhat or very certain” about the number of courses they wanted to take—86 percent wanted more than one or two courses. A third of respondents wanted to take a semester of courses—3 to 5—while 52 percent wanted 6 or more courses.

Respondents were asked to rate a number of possible reasons for leaving their institution; the top three factors that were rated as “somewhat or very important” in deciding to leave were: (1) they had completed all the credits needed or intended, (2) they changed their mind about their program or job goals, and (3) they transferred or qualified for admission elsewhere.

Short stay students with low GPAs were more likely to cite finances as a reason for leaving than were those with high GPAs (37 versus 24 percent). They were also more likely to say that they left because they lost interest in their studies (42 versus 16 percent). As well, a higher percentage of those with low GPAs reported that they left because they lacked clear goals or motivation, they were disappointed with their own performance, their program was too difficult, they changed their mind about their program or goals, or they got a job or decided to work.



When asked to report their *main* reason for leaving, at least 23 percent of short stay students said they left early because they had completed their program or completed the courses they wanted or needed—in many cases, to transfer to another program or institution.

“I had completed all the courses I intended to take there and was able to transfer.”

“I needed to complete a few courses in order to transfer to UBC and I left because I had completed them.”

“I completed my first section. I will be going back for more courses.”

A sizeable number of respondents (approximately 16 percent) said they left for employment or work.

“I needed to get employment and changed my mind about the program.”

“I left because I completed the course I registered in and got a job right after.”

“I started losing interest and found out it was not necessary to take the program in order to find a job.”

“I did a few courses and then got work, because I know I can go back and do more later.”

About 11 percent said their main reason for leaving had to do with finances and affordability.

“I was not able to take any more courses until I had the finances to pay for them, so I took time off from studying to work.”

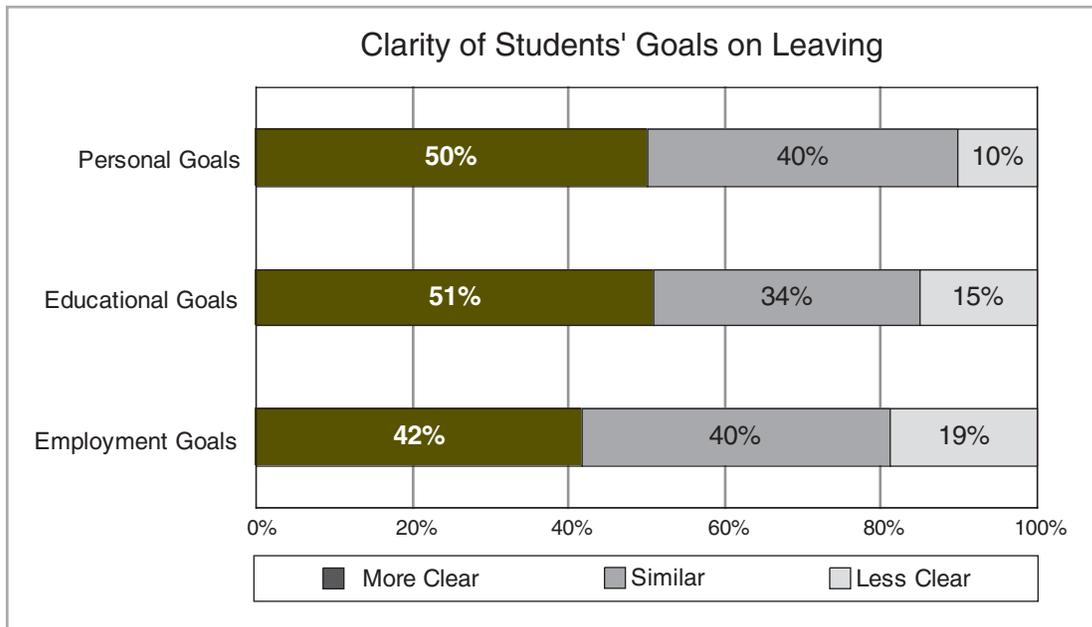
“The main reason I left was that the cost was too high for the student loan allowance that I was given, so I just couldn't afford to go to school.”

“I left because I ran out of money.”

“I left because the cost of living in BC was too high.”

Other factors that influenced their decision to leave may have included failed or dropped courses; however, 63 percent of respondents reported no course failures, although some 18 percent indicated they had failed two or more courses. As well, 55 percent of all respondents reported they had not dropped or withdrawn from any courses, 27 percent dropped or withdrew from one, and 18 percent, from two or more.

When asked about changes in the clarity of their goals, about 42 percent of respondents indicated that their employment goals were clearer when they left the institution than when they entered. In addition, about 50 percent of respondents indicated that their educational and personal goals were clearer when they left the institution than when they entered.



About 60 percent of respondents reported that they “mostly or completely” achieved their original objective for enrolling. Almost one-fifth (18 percent) said that their original objective for enrolling was not met at all. North Island College respondents were most likely to have reported achieving their original objective for enrolling—74 percent said they “mostly or completely” achieved this objective. Students with high GPAs more often reported achieving their objectives than did students with low GPAs (75 versus 49 percent). Students who went on to further studies reported that they had met their objective for enrolling more often than did those who did not seek further studies (64 versus 57 percent).

Evaluation of Education

Regardless of whether they achieved their original objective or not, 77 percent of respondents described their experience as worthwhile. Seventy-nine percent of respondents were “mainly or completely” satisfied with their overall experience of the institution, while 72 percent were “mainly or completely” satisfied with their program. Respondents from Selkirk College were most likely to report being “mainly or completely” satisfied with their program (84 percent). Students with high GPAs were also more likely to say they were satisfied with their program

There were no differences in program satisfaction ratings for those respondents who went on to further studies and those who did not. Interestingly, those students who did not seek further studies cited being “mainly or completely satisfied” with their overall experience at their institution more often than did respondents who did seek further studies (82 versus 75 percent).

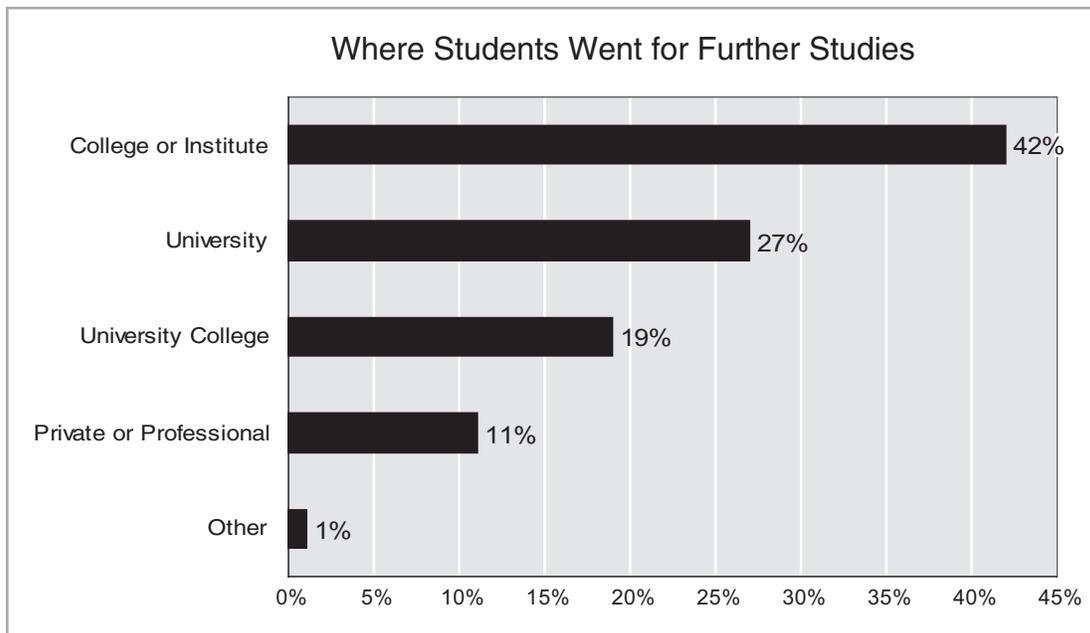
Educational standards (e.g., grading, challenge) received the greatest proportion (81 percent) of “good or very good” ratings from the short stay students surveyed. On the other hand, only 62 percent of respondents reported that the preparation they received for future work was “good or very good.” BCIT respondents were most likely to report that the preparation they received for future work was “good or very good.”



Further Education Outcomes

Since leaving their institution, almost half (46 percent) of all respondents took some further studies. Of these respondents, some 71 percent studied full-time. Respondents from Douglas College were more likely to go on to take further studies (59 percent).

Colleges and institutes received the greatest proportion of these short stay students—42 percent. A further 27 percent went to university, 19 percent to university college, and another 11 percent studied with a private or professional institution. Respondents from Douglas College taking further education were the most likely to choose a university (41 percent).

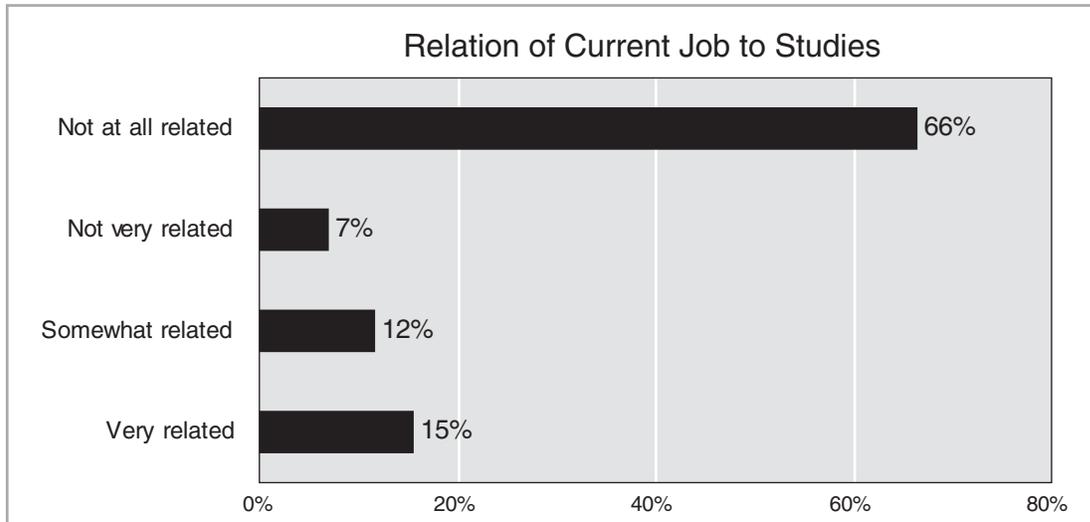


Sixty-two percent of respondents took courses that were “somewhat or very related” to what they studied at their college or university college, while 28 percent said their further education was not at all related.

Employment Outcomes

At the time of the survey, 69 percent of respondents were employed. Forty-three percent of respondents indicated that they got their job before they left their institution, and 28 percent reported that this employment was part of their desired career path. Of those working at the time of the survey, 37 percent had taken further studies since leaving their college or university college.

Just over one-quarter (27 percent) of respondents stated that their job was “somewhat or very related” to what they took in school. Students with high GPAs were more likely than those with low GPAs to be working in a job related to the training they took (38 versus 19 percent). BCIT respondents were most likely to report that their job was “somewhat or very related” to what they took in school.



Conclusion

In several ways—age and gender, for example—the short stay students appear typical of other college, university college, and institute students. The majority of short stay students had enrolled in Arts and Sciences programs, and a sizeable percentage had taken previous post-secondary education.

Almost all of the former students surveyed had registered at their institution initially because of courses or a program they wanted. Like other students, short stay students enrolled for a variety of reasons, including location of the institution, personal interest, and learning new job skills.

Again like other former students, short stay students left their programs with their share of successes and failures. There were many successes: the reasons short stay students gave for leaving included completing what they wanted and qualifying to transfer to another program or institution. Many simply changed their minds about the program, and many went to work.

For about half of respondents, their educational and personal goals were clarified by their experiences at their college or university college. A considerable majority were satisfied with their experience and thought it was worthwhile. Almost half went on to take some further education—a large number at private institutions. Although employment outcomes for short stay students are difficult to interpret, a sizeable majority were employed at the time of the survey.

Appendix

Origins of the 2003 BC College and Institute Short Stay Pilot Survey

In 1996, Douglas College did a study of its short stay students (defined as those who earned 9–23 credits before leaving) to ask why they left, what they did subsequently, and what they thought of their college experience. In 2002, Douglas College asked other institutions to co-operate and do a similar study. Seven institutions approached the Ministry for project funding.

When the Ministry notified them that funds were not available, six of the interested institutions continued with the project. In support of this “initiative from the field,” the British Columbia Outcomes Working Group (OWG) added funds to produce a summary report. The OWG is the group that oversees the BC College and Institute Student Outcomes Survey project.

Relationship to the BC College and Institute Student Outcomes Survey

Since 1988, BC’s public colleges, university colleges, and institutes, in co-operation with the Ministry of Advanced Education, have collected student feedback through the annual College and Institute Student Outcomes Survey (CISO). Former students from academic and applied programs are contacted by telephone 9–20 months after they have completed all, or a significant portion, of their program. They are asked if they were satisfied with the education they received and about their experiences at the institution, their employment status, and any further studies they’ve taken.

The Short Stay Pilot Survey was intended to complement the BC College and Institute Student Outcomes Survey. The participating institutions, which are members of OWG, wanted to use the expertise of the Centre for Education Information—managers of the CISO survey—to manage the short stay survey. This was seen as an efficient and effective approach to gathering information on former students who are not included in the regular CISO survey.

To ensure that the information from the Short Stay Pilot Survey would be available to all colleges, university colleges, and institutes, the OWG funded the production of this summary report. There is no budget provision for the survey to be done again; however, several other institutions have expressed interest in this type of survey.

Cohort Selection

The following criteria were used to select students for surveying:

- Students in preparatory (ABE and ESL) or adult special education programs were excluded because they require different questions and methodologies
- Students must have a minimum of 9 credits, to ensure they had sufficient exposure to the institution to provide informed comments

- The maximum number of credits earned is 23, to prevent overlap with the BC College and Institute Student Outcomes Survey cohort
- Students must have left the institution approximately 9–12 months prior to the survey

The criteria for former BCIT students are a little different, as follows:

- Students must have a minimum of 9 credits, to ensure they had sufficient exposure to the institution to provide informed comments
- Students must not have achieved more than 75 percent of the program requirement, to prevent overlap with the BC college and institute student outcomes survey cohort
- Students must have left the institution approximately 9–12 months prior to the survey

Response Rates

The cohort information was collected from participating institutions in January and February 2003. A data collection firm conducted the interviews, by telephone, between February 10 and March 31, 2003. Out of 2,273 former students eligible for surveying, 871 completed the survey, for a gross response rate of 38 percent. The response rate varied by participating institution, as follows:

Participating Institution	Cohort	Respondents	Response Rate
British Columbia Institute of Technology	412	150	36%
Douglas College	604	219	36%
North Island College	222	108	49%
Okanagan University College	347	155	45%
Selkirk College	354	118	33%
University College of the Cariboo	334	121	36%

It should be noted that this Short Stay Pilot Survey was limited in its scope—once the budget for data collection was expended, the interviewing stopped. The resulting response rate, therefore, does not match the rate that could have been achieved with a higher budget.

Percentages and Rounding

For consistency and ease of presentation, percentages in the report text and charts have been rounded to whole numbers and may not always add to 100. Unless otherwise noted, each percentage is based on the number of students who responded to the question—those who refused the question, or said “don’t know,” were not included in the calculation.