ABSTRACT

          According to this document, a central measure of
institutional effectiveness is how well individuals who receive a Dallas
County Community College District (DCCCD) education perform in the workplace.
A survey was mailed to employers who register with the DCCCD Job Bank to
recruit from the colleges. A total of 540 employers were mailed the survey in
February 1999. The 83 returned surveys were comprised of 20 non-deliverable
and 63 completed surveys. Because the response rate was so low (11.7%),
another survey was mailed to 474 businesses in March. Thirty-nine were
returned completed and 5 were non-deliverable, for an adjusted response rate
of 18.9%. More than 90% of employers believed DCCCD students were well
prepared for the workforce, while 9.8% believed they were not prepared. More
than 75% of employers surveyed indicated that an associate degree or
certificate increased an employee's chance for advancement, while only 10%
said it did not. Overall, employers expressed satisfaction with the
performance of DCCCD students, both in general and in terms of specific
skills. Employer responses covered students with various levels of
attainment, both with and without degrees or credentials. Survey instrument
appended. (Author/NB)

1999 Employer Follow-Up Survey of DCCCD Students

Dallas County Community College District

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INTRODUCTION

A central measure of institutional effectiveness is how well individuals who receive a DCCCD education perform in the work place. Are students meeting or exceeding employer expectations? In what areas are our students best prepared and in what areas are they least prepared? Answers to such questions provide an excellent basis for educational improvement.

A survey was mailed to employers who register with the DCCCD Job Bank to recruit from DCCCD colleges. The purpose of this survey was to address the following questions:

- What kinds of businesses are hiring DCCCD students?
- Are these businesses satisfied with student performance?
- Does a community college degree/certificate increase advancement opportunities?

A following summary of major findings addresses these questions and others. Links are provided to college-specific data and the survey instrument.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Surveys were mailed to a sample of companies who actively post job-openings with the DCCCD. Employers were asked to respond to the questions based on their experiences with current and/or former DCCCD students in their employ. While this approach does not permit the tracking of specific students (but rather asks the employer to assess all DCCCD students they have employed), it provides meaningful assessment of former students without fatal selection bias.

Conventional methods of employer follow-up surveys have required student permission to interview employers; subsequently, the sampling frame was reduced to those employers whom students wished to be interviewed. This tends to lead to a systematically positive bias in employer attitudes and opinions, since students who have had negative experiences are less likely to participate.

The approach used in this study blindly surveyed all employers who may have hired DCCCD students, permitting free response. Since the employer was not tied to a particular student, they were given the freedom to evaluate as many students as they have employed. The limitations to this approach are that

- employers may be evaluating individuals from other colleges, under the incorrect assumption that they are DCCCD students, and
- survey responses can not be easily tied to a specific academic or technical occupation program.

A total of 540 employers were mailed the survey (see Appendix) in February, 1999. The 83 returned surveys were comprised of 20 non-deliverable and 63 completed surveys. Since the adjusted response rate of 11.7% was not deemed acceptable, a second mailing was done in March. Of the 474 surveys mailed, 5 were returned non-deliverable and 39 were completed. This brought the total adjusted response rate to 18.9%. One employer gave separate evaluations

COMPANIES RECRUITING DCCCD STUDENTS (BY LINE)

Students were recruited by a broad spectrum of companies. These companies did not necessarily fall into conventional manufacturing, wholesaling, retailing and service categories, but fell into very specific lines of business. Given a set of sixteen lines of business, employers classified themselves as follows:

Line of Business	Number
Other	42
Medical/health care services	10
Computer/networking	7
Retailing	6
Banking/financial services	6
Government	6
Manufacturing	5
Food service	5
Education/learning	5
Telecommunications	4
Insurance	2
Real estate services	2
Legal services	1
Wholesaling	1

Those who were categorized as "other" lines of business were given the opportunity to specify their line of business. The results were quite diverse. The following is a list of those responses:

- Appliance Repair
- Auto Repair
- Child care
- Consulting Organization
- Customer Service
- Drug treatment
- Employment Search
- Heating - Air Conditioning Co.
- Hospitality
- HVAC
- Industrial
- Information Research
- Information technology consulting
- Jewelry wholesale supply
- Landscape Services
- Leak detection services for UST's
- Management
- Material handling equipment
- Non-profit
- Printing
- Public accounting
- Recreation
- Recreation Services
- Refrigeration Contractor
- Sales
- Salon Services
- Service
- Social Service
- Social Services (child care teachers)
- Software programming & sales for oil & gas industry.
- Staffing
- Substance abuse, treatment services
- Technical Recruiter
- Technical services
- Telephone answering service
- Veterinary
- Veterinary Medicine
- Veterinary practice
- Vocational Services, resale of donations
- We basically count merchandise for retail, grocery, and convenience stores.

COMPANIES RECRUITING DCCCD STUDENTS (BY NAME)

The employers were given the option of specifying their company's name. Most employers responded, giving the following list:

- Advantage Copier and Laser
- Affiliated Computer Services
- Almcoc Refrigeration Co.
- Artesia Data Systems, Inc.
- Bank One
- BLT Landscape Services
- BMS Mechanical Services
- Born Again Cars
- Bryan House Publishers, Inc.
- Café Express
- Camargo Air Compressor.
- Census Bureau
- Childcare Resources, Inc.
- Childcare Training Systems, Inc.
- Children's Medical Center of Dallas
- City of Dallas
- Colorfast Photos
- CompUSA Call Center
- Coppell Veterinary Hospital
- Corporate Relocation, Inc
- CTG (Computer Task Group)
- Dain Rouscker, Inc.
- Dallas County
- EAI Healthcare Staffing Solutions, Inc.
- Fireman's Fund Insurance
- Firestone Store
- Foretravel of Texas
- Friends Barber and Beauty Salon
- General Information Services, Inc.
- Gingiss Formal Wear
- Goodwill Industries of Dallas, Inc.
- Greenville Animal Hospital
- Head Start of Greater Dallas, Inc.
- Hilton Hotels, Co.
- Hotel Crescent Court
- IKON-DLS
- Insight Employment Assistance
- Lane Gorman Trubitt, L.L.P.
- Lee Jarmon Ford, Inc.
- Medical Connections, Inc.
- Montgomery Ward
- N.J. Malin and Associates Inc.
- Nexus Recovery Center, Inc.

- NMAC
- North Dallas Physical Therapy
- Nova Care
- Our Brother's Keeper - NDUGU, Inc.
- Park Plaza Animal Clinic
- Parkland Health & Hospital System
- Precise Connections, Inc.
- Ramirez & Associates, P.C.
- Remedy Staffing
- Saint Michael-All Angels Child Development Center
- SBA Business Brokers, Inc.
- Sears Repair Services
- Simmons
- Square "D" Corp.
- Starbucks
- Summertree Animal & Bird Clinic
- Swest Inc.
- TCIM Services, Inc.
- Texins
- The Animal Care Center
- Thompson Animal Hospital
- Trammell Crow Company
- Trinity River Mission
- U.S. Dept. of Justice - F.B.I.
- Unitron Inc.
- Via Tech Services, Inc.
- Volunteer Center of Dallas County
- Worldwide Express
- YWCA of Metro Dallas

COLLEGES STUDENTS ATTENDED

Most of the employers noted that they recruited students from more than one college. It was not uncommon to find employers who hired from adjacent colleges (e.g., Brookhaven and Richland, or Brookhaven, Richland and Eastfield). Employers were not asked how many employees (DCCCD students) formed the basis of their evaluation. However, a conservative estimate leads us to no less than 202 students in the following breakdown:

College	Number
Brookhaven College	31
Cedar Valley College	20
Eastfield College	28

El Centro College	20
Mountain View College	17
North Lake College	15
Richland College	32
Unspecified DCCCD college	20
Don't know	9
None of the above	10

It is worth noting that relatively few responses (approximately 10%) dealt with unspecified DCCCD colleges, while even fewer dealt with unknown colleges. This suggests that most employers had clear ideas of which DCCCD institutions their employees attended.

EMPLOYER ASSESSMENTS OF FORMER DCCCD STUDENTS

Employers were given the opportunity to make assessments about the performance of DCCCD students, based on a fixed set of attributes and were encouraged to list any other skills/requisites which they felt were important for their specific business. Employers were also asked (yes or no) if they felt students were adequately prepared for the business world. Furthermore, they were asked if they believed a 2-year degree or certificate increases the employee's chance for advancement in the company.

Importance/Performance Ratings

Attribute	Average Importance	Rank (Import)	Average Performance	Rank (Perform)
Attendance/dependability	4.90	1	3.97	2
Listening	4.82	2	3.96	4
Ability to work with others	4.77	3	3.97	1
Verbal communication	4.73	4	3.76	7
Ability to work independently	4.60	5	3.82	6
Initiative	4.57	6	3.70	12
Reading	4.56	7	3.97	3
Problem solving	4.49	8	3.73	9
Resourcefulness	4.48	9	3.75	8
Writing	4.45	10	3.86	5
Leadership	4.12	11	3.40	13

Computer/technical	3.91	12	3.70	11
Mathematical	3.72	13	3.71	10

Employers rated the importance of each attribute as well as employee performance relative to each attribute. Agreement between importances and performances is good (correlation coefficient = .69), which suggests that students are performing best in areas that employers deem most important. A notable exception was students' relatively poor verbal communication and initiative. Additionally, students performed well in reading and writing, though these were not considered as important as some other attributes.

Note that importance and performance were both scaled from one (low importance/performance) to five (high importance/performance). Using this convention, we can see that all skills were of considerable importance. Alternatively, performances were not rated as highly on the same five point scale; however, all attributes were rated above the mid-point, suggesting that students are performing in a satisfactory fashion.

Are Students Successfully Prepared for the Workplace?

Most employers believed that DCCCD students are well prepared for the workforce (90.2%), while few (9.8%) believed that they were not prepared. While these numbers are encouraging, they provide us the opportunity to explore areas of difference between those who are well prepared and those who are not. The following tables compares average performance scores for those whom employers believed were well-prepared versus those whom employers believed were not:

Attribute	Performance (Prepared=Yes)	Performance (Prepared=No)
Ability to work with others	4.12	2.86
Attendance/dependability	4.08	3.14
Listening	4.07	3.14
Reading	4.03	3.57
Ability to work independently	4.02	2.29
Writing	3.98	3.00
Resourcefulness	3.90	2.71
Computer/technical	3.90	2.71
Problem solving	3.89	2.42
Verbal communication	3.86	2.83
Initiative	3.85	2.57

Mathematical	3.80	3.33
Leadership	3.51	2.42
- Avg. number of responses	60	7

Although the number of employers who feel students are not adequately prepared is very small (5), the numbers still provide meaningful insights into the factors that DCCCD students have failed at in the workplace. Among this group of employers, only four attributes have scores of 3 or higher (indicating average to above average performance): 1) mathematical, 2) reading, 3) listening, 4) writing and 5) attendance. All of these skills are fundamental skills an employer would expect from anyone entering the workforce, including those without college experience.

Alternatively, nine attributes have scores below 3, indicating below average performance: 1) ability to work independently, 2) problem solving, 3) verbal communications, 4) initiative, 5) leadership, 6) resourcefulness, 7) computer/technical, and 8) ability to work with others. Many of these are personal traits and attributes which employers would expect college experience to meaningfully enhance (e.g., problem solving skills).

Other Skills/Competencies Listed by Employers

When asked to list other skills important for their employees, employers provided a very diverse list of skills. Most dealt with <u>specific skills for the line of business</u>. The most commonly cited included:

- Patience
- Work ethics
- Empathy/caring attitude
- Communication skills
- Positive attitude
- Writing skills

The complete list of skills cited (verbatim) by employers is as follows:

- Business math.
- Good attitude.
- Professional communication, business writing.
- Work history.
- Job readiness, resume development, interview skills, basic work ethics training.
- Technical curriculum, emphasize electronics, mechanical knowledge.
- Medical techniques.
- Empathy (in taking care of patients).
- Versatility (in social environments).
- Attendance/dependability.

- Team interaction, self discipline, good attitude.
- Publish education material.
- Desire, patience, caring.
- Self-confidence in work skills, personal presentation/hygiene, well rounded knowledge of how to relate to business, research ability.
- Better lab skills.
- Improved skills with common courtesy and better skills at placing iv catheters and tracheal tubes.
- Time management, organizational skills, stress management.
- Writing - taking notes.
- Smiling face and energetic attitude.
- Willingness to start at entry level and work up.
- Early childhood training.
- Experience in the workforce, stability.
- Strong work ethic.
- Less reliance on "entitlements" and more focus on "merit". Teach perserverence.
- More industry trades.
- Interest in job by doing extra activities that no only benefit the company but also the employee.
- Spanish knowledge, customer service.
- Public speaking in terms of dealing with public on day to day basis.
- More chemical dependency knowledge coming out of the program.

Does a 2-yr Degree or Certificate Increase Chance for Advancement?

To get a complete picture of employee performance and *potential*, employers were asked if an associate degree or certificate increases an employee's chance for advancement in their organization. The results were overwhelming positive, with more than 75% indicating that the degree/certificate increases advancement opportunity, and only 10% indicating that the degree/ certificate does not increase advancement opportunity. A breakdown of responses is as follows:

Response	Number
Definitely yes	42
Probably yes	35
Uncertain	14
Probably not	9
Definitely not	1

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Overall employer response was very encouraging. Most expressed satisfaction with the performance of DCCCD students, in general and in terms of specific skills. The employers captured a broad cross-section of the regional business environment and recruited a good balance of students from the seven district colleges.

It should be noted that employer evaluations were not limited to DCCCD graduates. While a relatively small percentage of District students graduate each year, many more do not yet are employed. Thus, employer responses cover students with various levels of educational attainment.

●College-Specific Data

- Survey Instrument
- Brookhaven College Data
- Cedar Valley College Data
- Eastfield College Data
- El Centro College Data
- Mountain View College Data
- North Lake College Data
- Richland College Data

Prepared by District Office of Research, June 1999

1. Have you hired former students from the following DCCCD colleges? Check all that apply.

    ___ Brookhaven College   ___ North Lake College
    ___ Cedar Valley College   ___ Richland College
    ___ Eastfield College   ___ DCCCD - but not sure of the exact college(s)
    ___ El Centro College   ___ Don't know
    ___ Mountain View College ___ None of the above

2. In your opinion, does the associate degree or certificate increase an employee's chance for advancement in your organization?

    ___ Definitely yes   ___ Probably yes   ___ Uncertain   ___ Probably not   ___ Definitely not

3. Based upon your experience in supervising employees who attended DCCCD colleges, please indicate the *importance* of the following factors and your *satisfaction* with the preparation of these employees in the listed skill areas. Circle the number that best reflects importance/performance, or "unsure".

Importance of Skill	Skill Area	Employee Preparation
Unimportant --- Important		Unsatisfactory ---- Satisfactory
1 2 3 4 5 Unsure	Verbal Communication	1 2 3 4 5 Unsure
1 2 3 4 5 Unsure	Writing	1 2 3 4 5 Unsure
1 2 3 4 5 Unsure	Reading	1 2 3 4 5 Unsure
1 2 3 4 5 Unsure	Listening	1 2 3 4 5 Unsure
1 2 3 4 5 Unsure	Computer/technical	1 2 3 4 5 Unsure
1 2 3 4 5 Unsure	Mathematical	1 2 3 4 5 Unsure
1 2 3 4 5 Unsure	Problem solving	1 2 3 4 5 Unsure
1 2 3 4 5 Unsure	Leadership	1 2 3 4 5 Unsure
1 2 3 4 5 Unsure	Ability to work with others	1 2 3 4 5 Unsure
1 2 3 4 5 Unsure	Ability to work independently	1 2 3 4 5 Unsure
1 2 3 4 5 Unsure	Resourcefulness	1 2 3 4 5 Unsure
1 2 3 4 5 Unsure	Initiative	1 2 3 4 5 Unsure
1 2 3 4 5 Unsure	Attendance/dependability	1 2 3 4 5 Unsure

4. Overall, do you feel DCCCD is successfully preparing its students for the workplace? ___ Yes ___ No

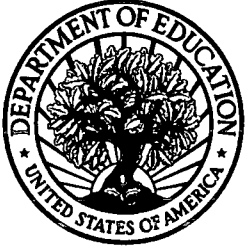5. Please specify any other skills/competencies that you feel the employee should have:

    _____

    _____

6. How would you best categorize your line of business? (choose only one)

    ___ Retailing   ___ Travel/tourism
    ___ Manufacturing   ___ Education/learning
    ___ Wholesaling   ___ Government
    ___ Food service   ___ Telecommunications
    ___ Medical/health care services   ___ Heating/refrigeration
    ___ Legal services   ___ Computer/networking
    ___ Banking/financial services   ___ Real estate services
    ___ Veterinary services   ___ Recruitment/staffing
    ___ Insurance   ___ Other (Please specify: _____)

6. (OPTIONAL) Name of your company: _____

    Please return the survey in the enclosed envelope. Thank you for valuable input.

NOTICE

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