

Dallas College Alumni Insights on Value and Career Success Through the Strada Community College Outcomes Survey



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Introduction

Alumni surveys provide retrospective evaluations of the college experience and measure motivations along with outcomes such as completion, educational value, career paths, and earnings. Traditionally used by four-year institutions to assess performance and maintain alumni engagement, they are increasingly being adopted by two-year colleges, including Dallas College, to build [alumni networks](#) and leverage their resources. From an institutional investment perspective, alumni surveys reveal how graduates judge the impact of their college experience on their academic achievement and career success. However, with wages increasing over the past decade for individuals without a baccalaureate, the relative advantage of a college degree is less pronounced and public confidence in the value of a college degree, particularly as a pathway to well-paying employment, has [diminished significantly](#). [Recent research from the Lumina Foundation and Gallup](#) shows a disconnect between public skepticism and actual student outcomes: while many Americans doubt higher education (64%), approximately 75% to 90% of students and graduates report positive experiences, effective career preparation, and believe their degree is worth the investment. Likewise, a historical review of alumni feedback from the Community College Outcomes Survey shows that perceptions of the Dallas College experience, especially its value, cost, and employment outcomes, have remained consistently positive.

In collaboration with Strada Education Network, the Research Institute at Dallas College launched the Institution's first college-wide alumni outcomes survey in fall 2022. The survey sought to improve understanding of the perceived value of the Dallas College

experience among former students and to build the foundation for a data collection process from this population—all with the purpose of improving the educational experiences of both current and future Dallas College students. Dallas College was among several community colleges across the nation participating in Strada’s first pilot survey tailored to two-year colleges to explore education experiences and post-college outcomes of former students. The survey’s scope was comprehensive, as it provided data on the various education, work, and life pathways of attendees; it sought to understand alumni’s motivations for attending Dallas College, the experiences they had, the skills they gained, and their life and career pathways.

First published in 2023, this updated brief presents findings based on the responses of 1,553 former students who completed 12 semester credit hours or more at Dallas College between 2012 and 2022¹. The questionnaire was fielded from November 14 to December 4, 2022, to an alumni sample going back to approximately 2002. The following sections synthesize Dallas College alumni views on the value and impact of their education and experiences on their careers and lives. Results from the Dallas College survey are compared with a national sample from the NORC (National Opinion Research Center) AmeriSpeak public opinion survey. Specifically, Strada questionnaire items are linked to and benchmarked against AmeriSpeak survey items that measure similar perceptions and outcomes, and comparisons are estimated through net benefit scores. Results are presented as both an overall grouping of all survey respondents and by credential level: associate degree completers, certificate completers, and those who did not complete any credential at Dallas College (including transfers to four-year and other two-year institutions, as well as stop-outs); the data suggest that transfer students constitute a larger proportion in this category than individuals who attended college without earning a degree.

While the overall perception of the value of a Dallas College education was positive, and particularly so among associate degree completers, outcome measures for employment status, earnings, and educational advancement were comparatively low for associate completers. Implications of these trends and suggestions for improving outcomes are highlighted in the concluding sections.

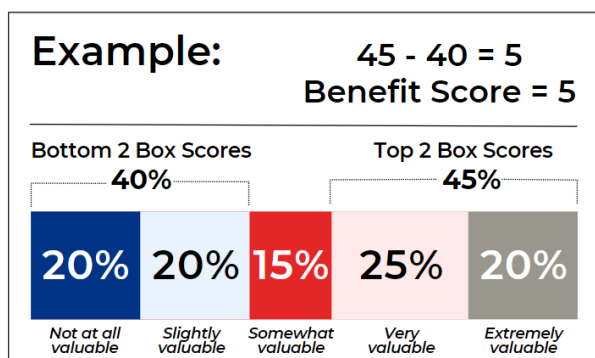
¹ Data come from the Strada Community College Outcomes Survey (2022-2023). Responses from Dallas College alumni were collected in partnership with the University of Wisconsin Survey Center. Data from the national sample were collected in partnership with NORC at the University of Chicago from a nationally representative group of individuals who attended a community college from 2012 to 2022 and were not enrolled at the time the survey was administered.

How did Dallas College alumni perceptions compare to those of alumni from other institutions participating in the national survey?²

Overall, Dallas College alumni reported higher levels of satisfaction, preparation, perceived value, and overall college experience compared to alumni from other U.S. community colleges.

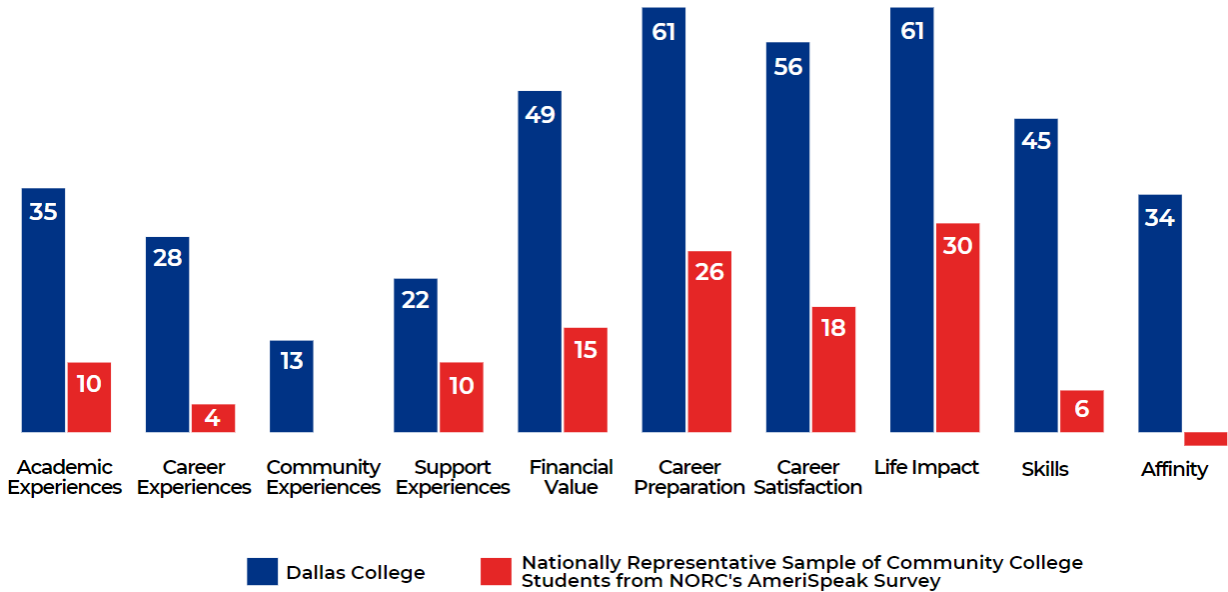
Benefit scores show the relative positive or negative score of each Likert scale question within broader categories (e.g., Academic Experiences, Financial Value, Career Satisfaction, etc.). Two 5-point Likert response scales are used for the questions and include either the levels *not at all valuable*, *slightly valuable*, *somewhat valuable*, *very valuable*, and *extremely valuable* or the levels *strongly disagree*, *somewhat disagree*, *neither agree nor disagree*, *somewhat agree*, and *strongly agree*. These scores are calculated based on the percentage of responses for each level within a question (see figure below). The bottom two boxes indicate the proportion of respondents who selected *not at all valuable* and *slightly valuable* for a question, and the top two boxes indicate the proportion of respondents who selected *very valuable* and *extremely valuable* for the question. The bottom two box scores are subtracted from the top two box scores (45% - 40% = 5% in the example in Figure 1 below) to calculate a benefit score for each question. These benefit scores within a category are then averaged to create a Net Benefit Score for that category. The Net Benefit Scores are depicted by credential completion status in the graphs below.

Figure 1. Example of Net Benefit Score Calculation



² A sample of 1,014 adults aged 18+ who attended community college were selected from the NORC AmeriSpeak Panel. Responses were weighted by age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, and census division to benchmarks from the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (CPS) for the population of US adults aged 18+ who attended community college from 2012 to 2022. The survey was administered from the beginning of December 2022 through the end of January 2023.

Figure 2. Perceptions of Dallas College Alumni vs. National Sample of Community College Students



To what extent did alumni feel their education helped them achieve their goals and was worth the cost?

The perceived value of a Dallas College education was positive across all credential completion levels, including among those who did not complete a credential. However, associate degree completers were most inclined to believe their Dallas College education was worth the cost and helped them achieve their goals.

Figure 3.1. Education Helped Achieve Goals and Was Worth the Cost - All Students

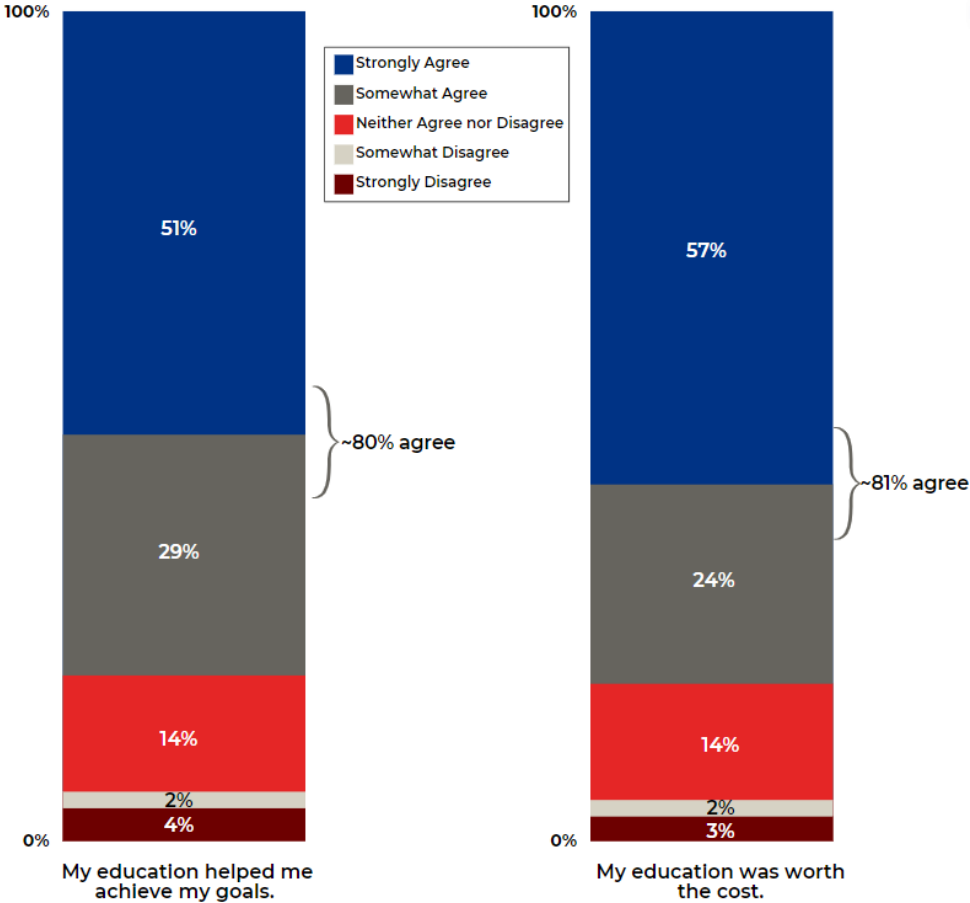


Figure 3.2. Education Helped Achieve Goals and Was Worth the Cost – Associate Completers

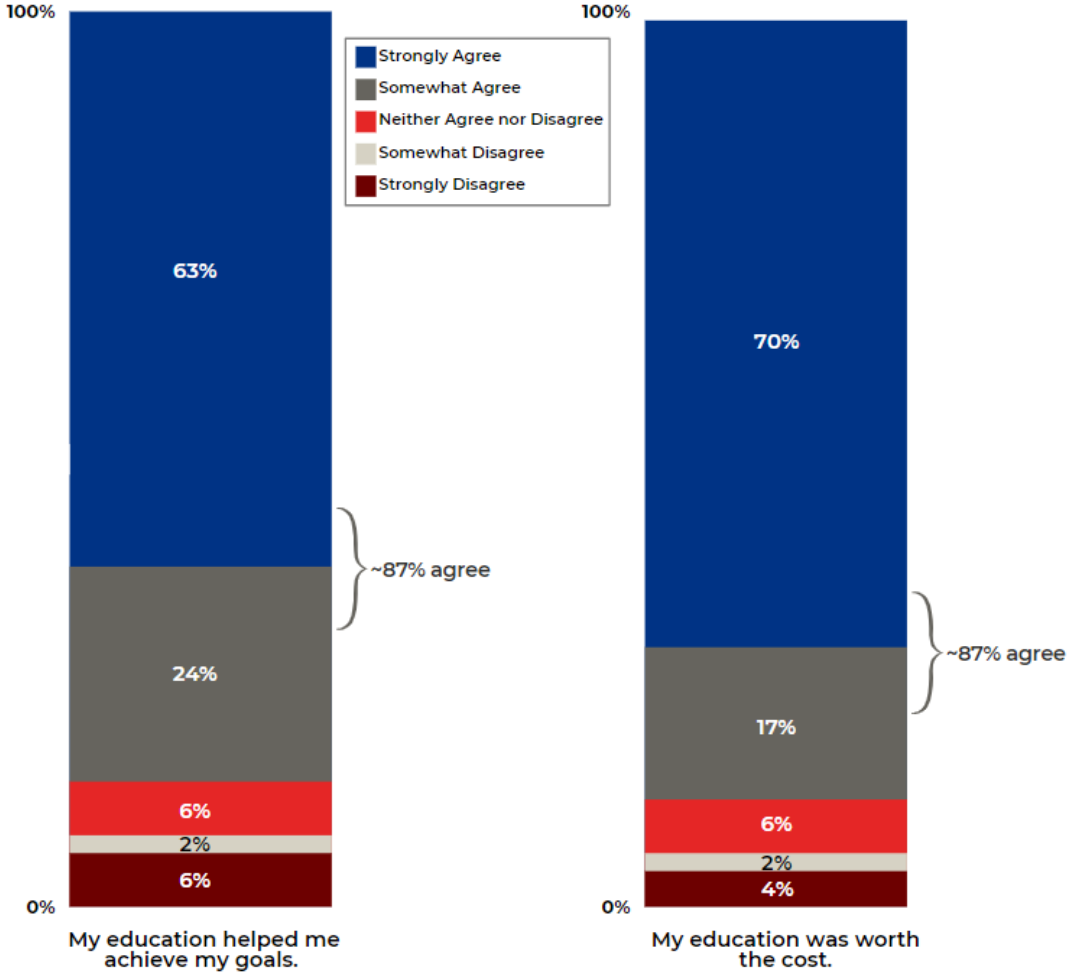


Figure 3.3. Education Helped Achieve Goals and Was Worth the Cost – Certificate Completers

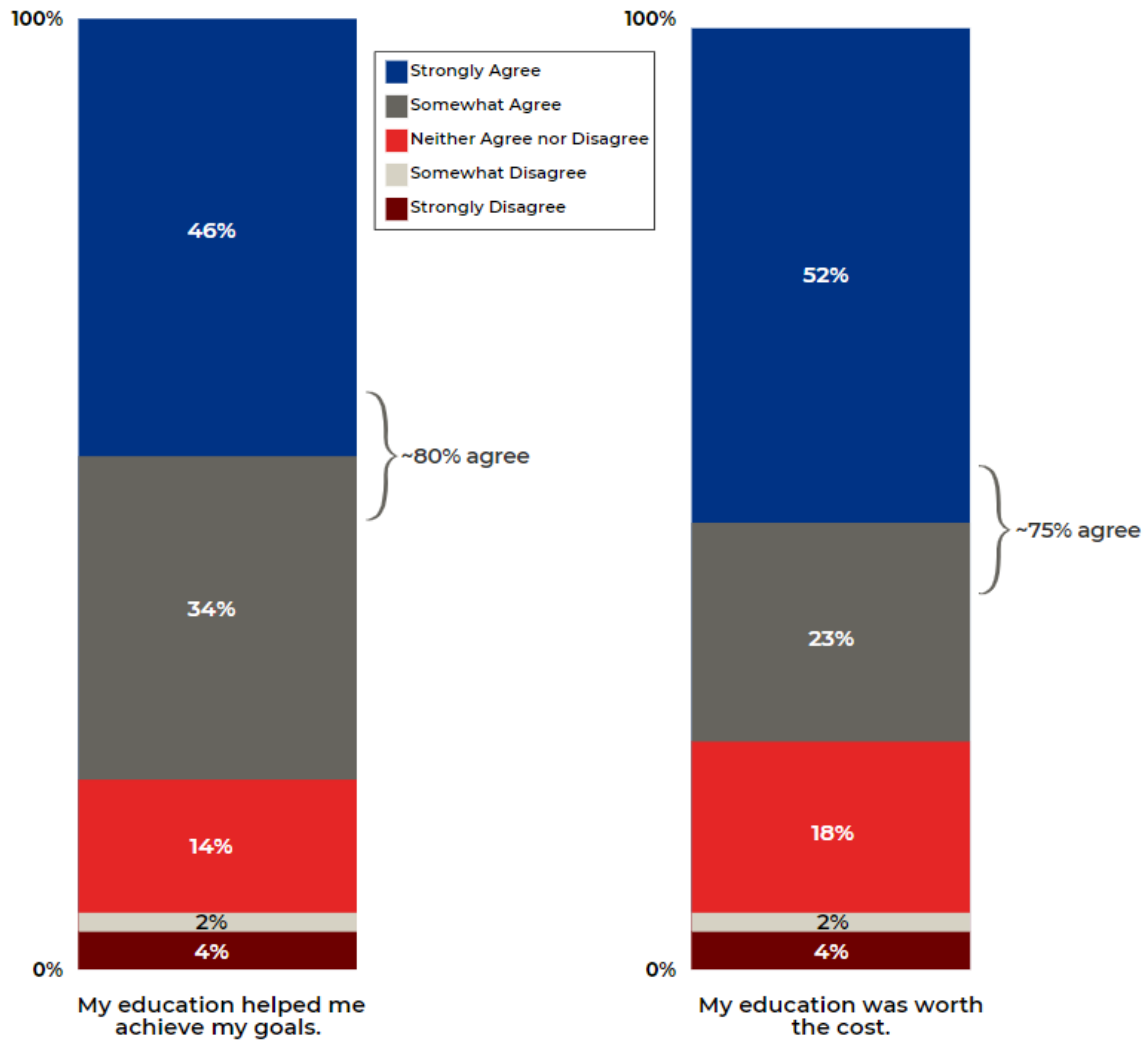
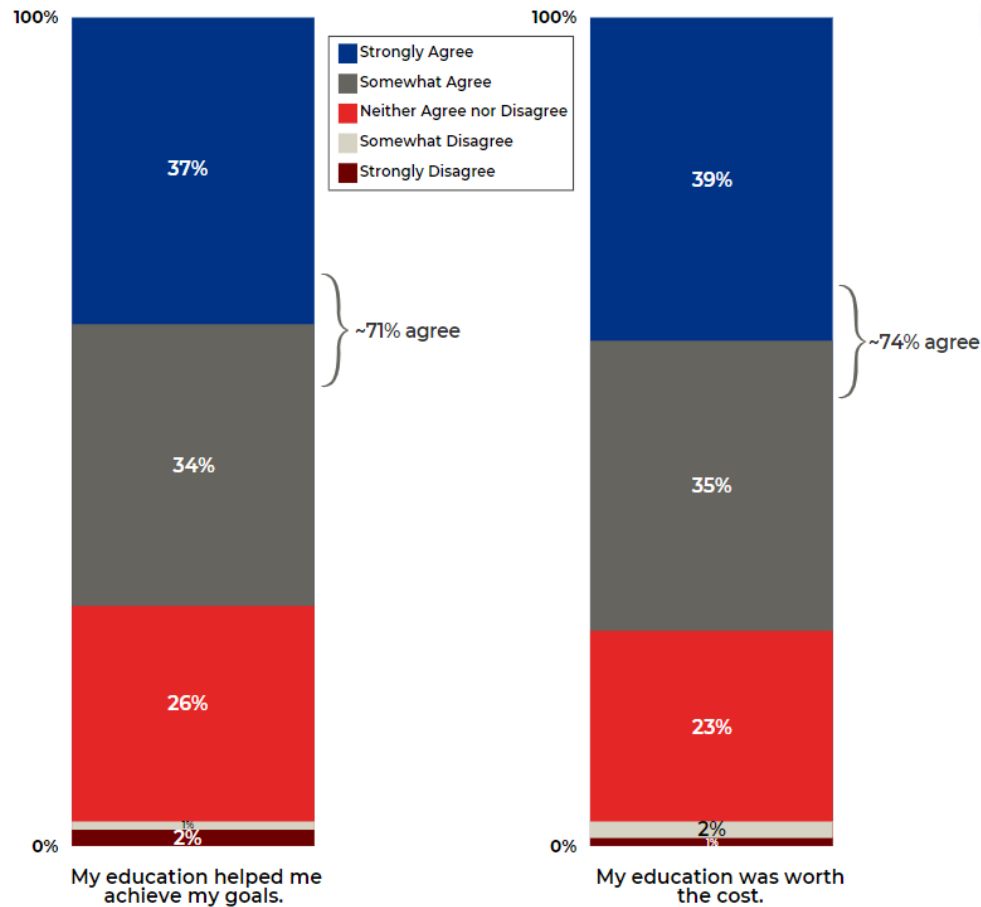


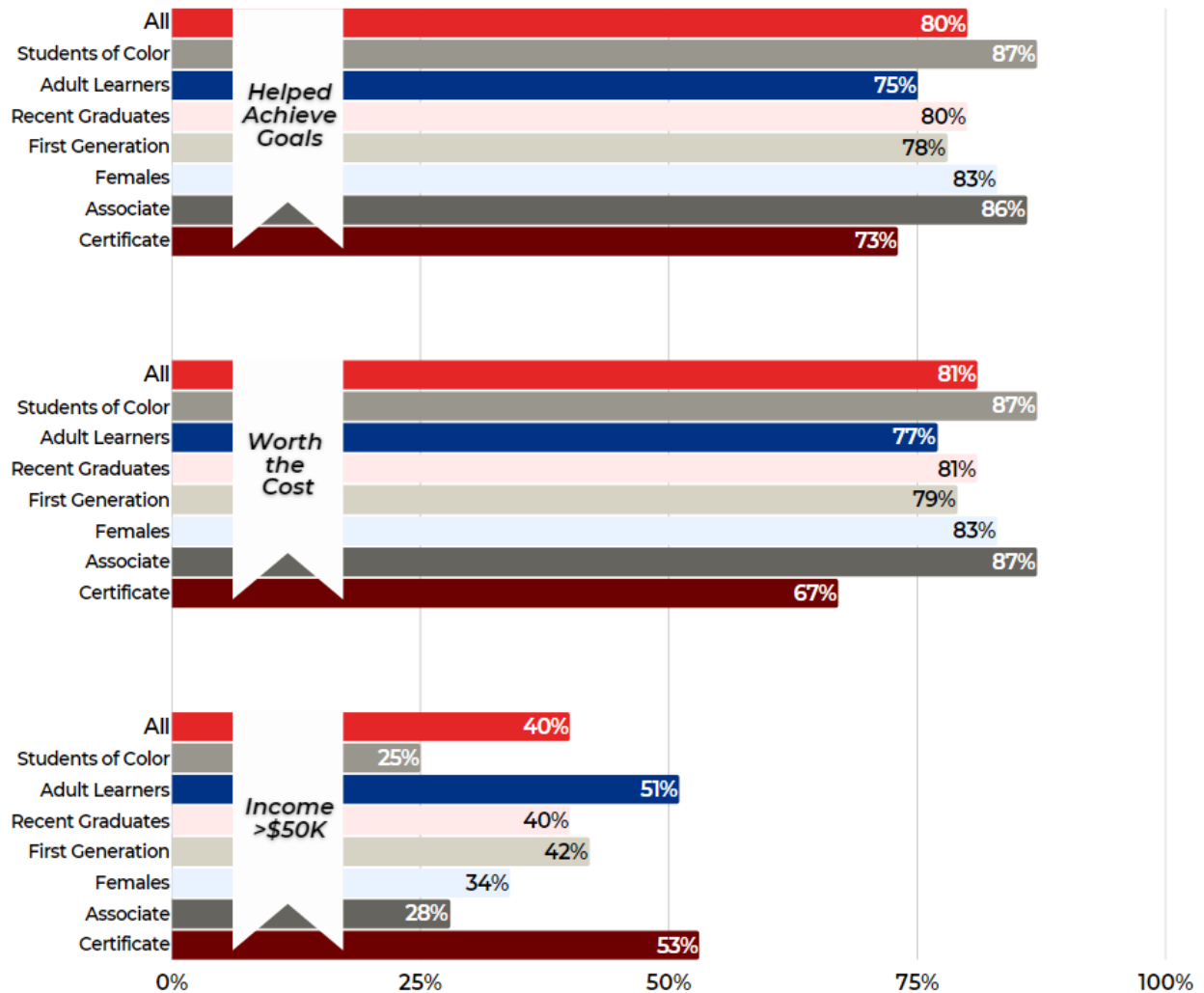
Figure 3.4. Education Helped Achieve Goals and Was Worth the Cost – No Dallas College Credential (Including Both Transfers and Some College, No Degree)



To what extent did different student groups among alumni feel their education helped them achieve their goals and was worth the cost? To what extent did these groups earn more than \$50K per year?

In comparison to White students, students of color across all credential completion levels were most likely to feel their Dallas College education was worth the cost and helped them achieve their goals. However, students of color across all credential completion levels were least likely to earn an income of over \$50,000.

Figure 4. Education Helped Achieve Goals and Was Worth the Cost – Summary Findings by Subgroup for All Students



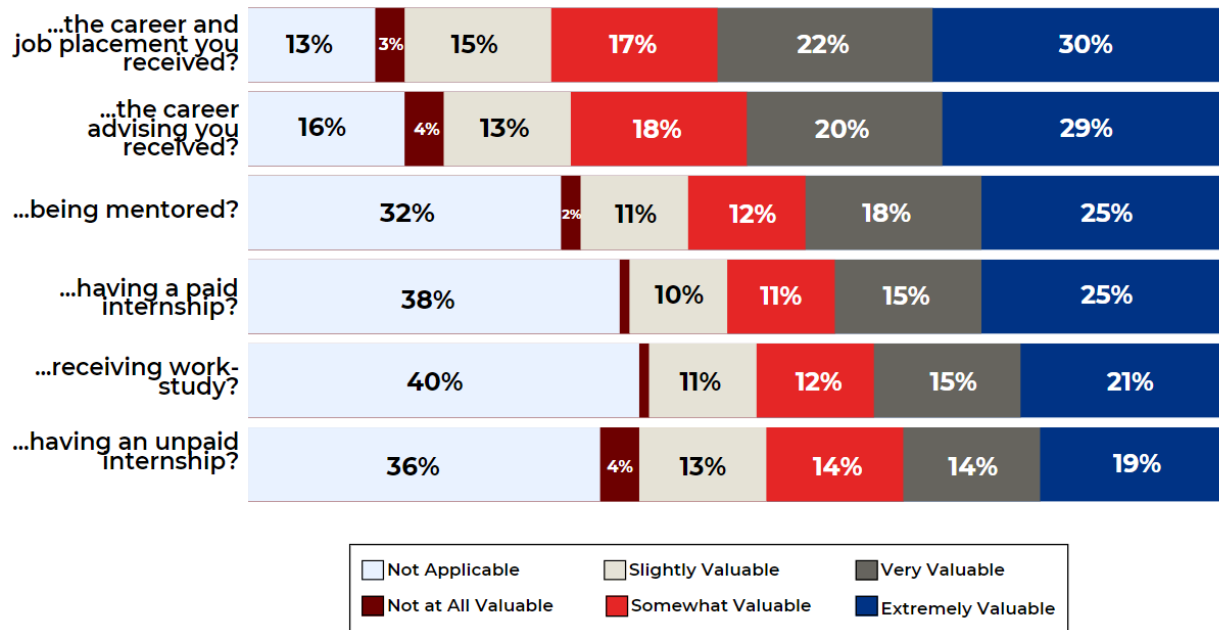
How valuable did alumni find their career experiences?

Among those respondents who found career supports applicable to their Dallas College experience, obtaining an occupation post-education, career advising, and mentorship were the most salient factors determining value (*extremely and very valuable*) in career experiences.³

³ Labels not included for responses of ≤ 1%. Rows may not sum to exactly 100% due to rounding.

Figure 5. Value of Career Experiences for All Students

How valuable was...



How valuable did alumni find their community experiences?⁴

Among those respondents who found community experiences applicable to their time at Dallas College, making professional connections was perceived to be most valuable across all credential completion categories as well as among non-completers (*extremely* and *very valuable*). Attending speaking forums, events, and discussions ranked second in value for all respondents overall and associate completers, while networking with alumni ranked second for certificate completers. Non-completers of credentials found value in off-campus volunteering/community engagement more so than on-campus enrichment and professional development opportunities.

⁴ Labels not included for responses of ≤ 1%. Rows may not sum to exactly 100% due to rounding.

Figure 6.1. Value of Community Experiences - All Students

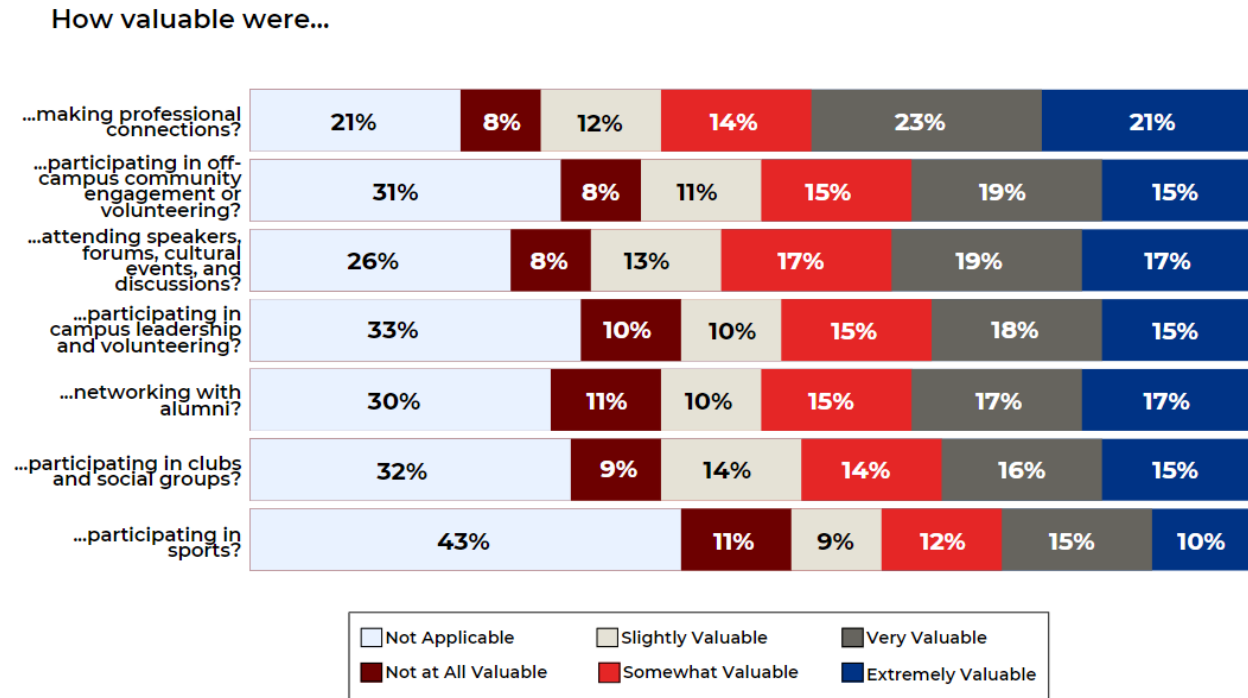


Figure 6.2. Value of Community Experiences – Associate Completers

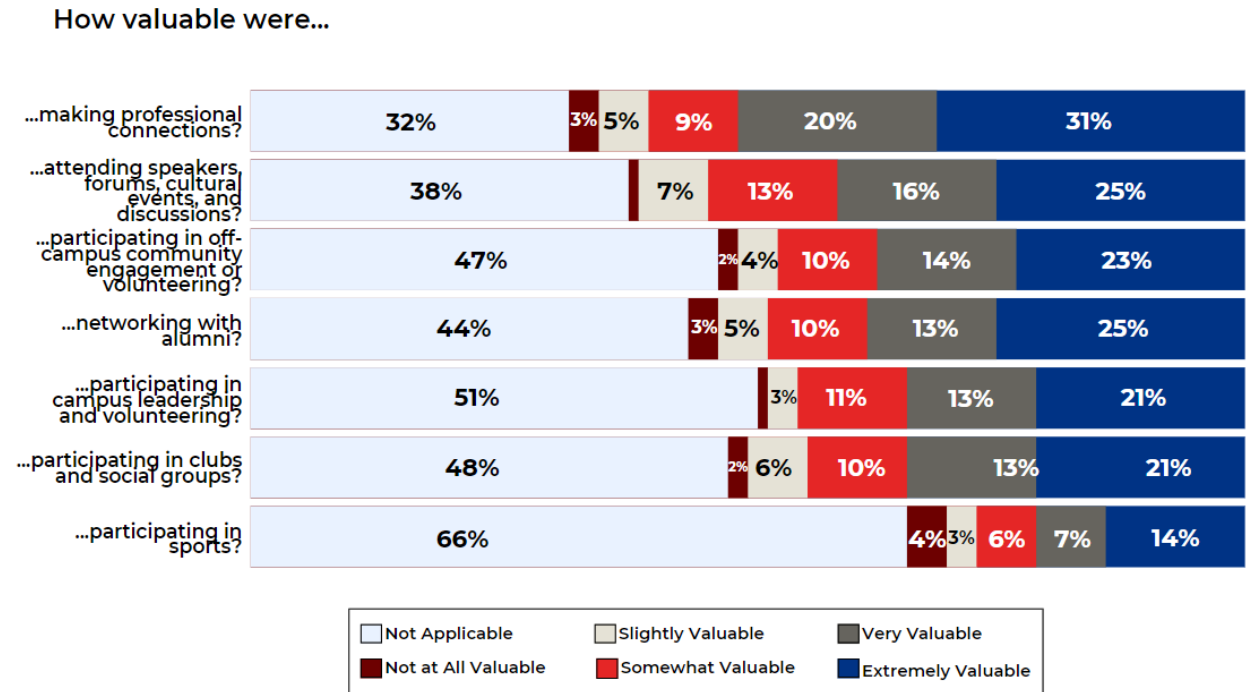


Figure 6.3. Value of Community Experiences – Certificate Completers

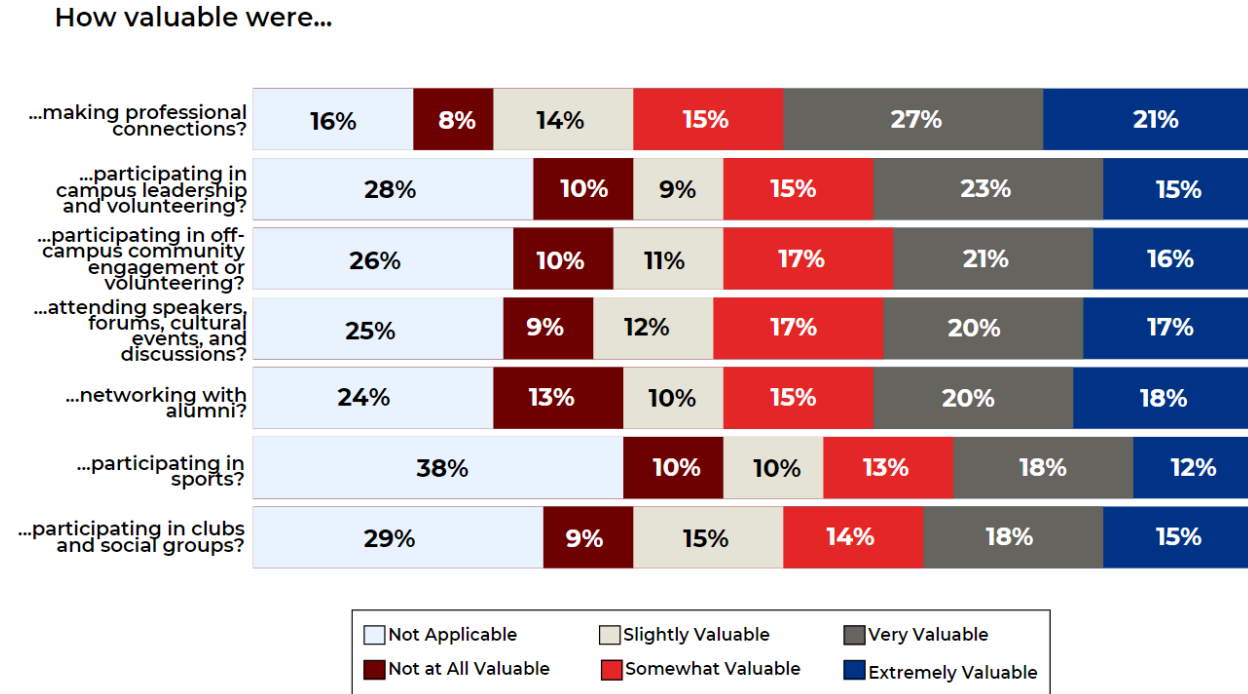
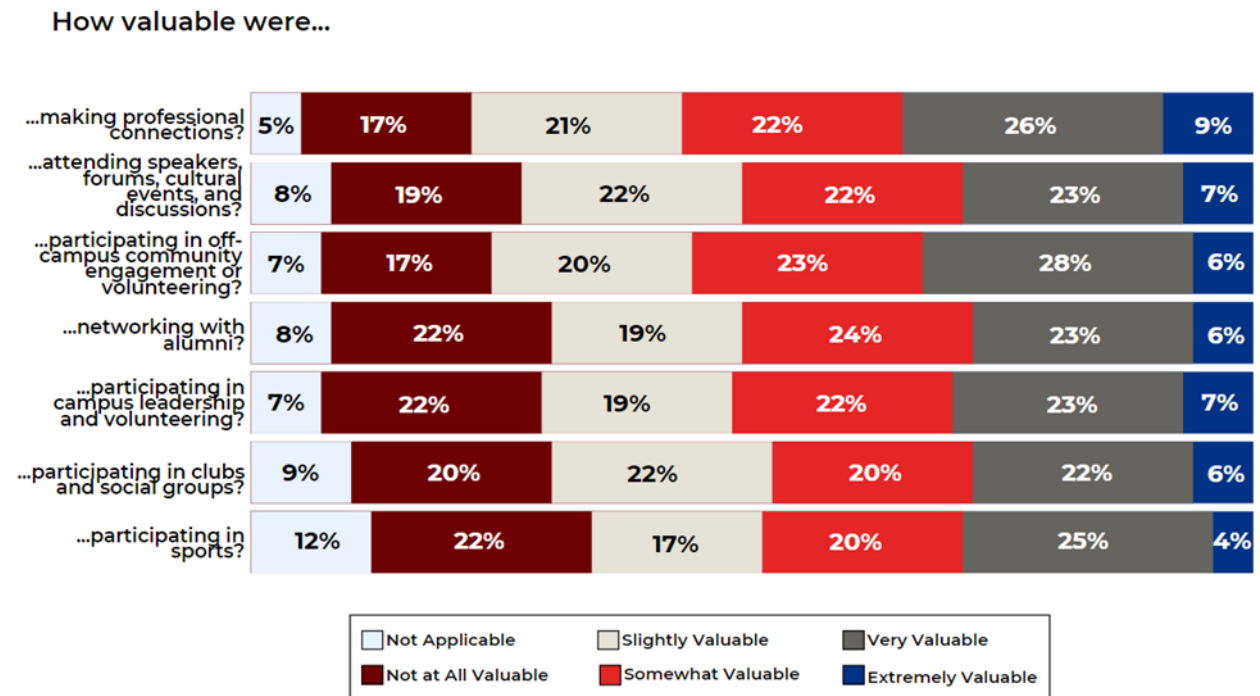


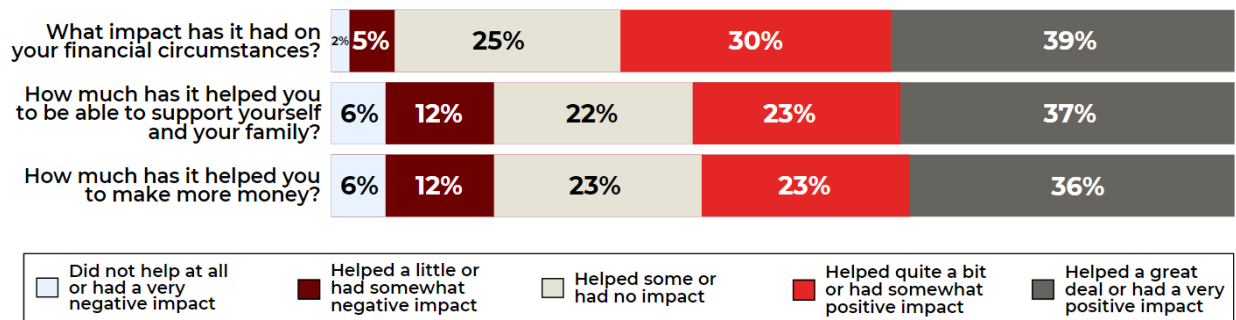
Figure 6.4. Value of Community Experiences – No Dallas College Credential (Including Both Transfers and Some College, No Degree)



What financial value did alumni attribute to their Dallas College education?⁵

Alumni across all credential completion levels (including those without a credential) were more likely to believe than not that their Dallas College education had at least a fairly positive impact (*helped quite a bit* and *helped a great deal*) on their earnings, their financial circumstances, and their ability to support themselves and their families.

Figure 7. Financial Value of Education for All Students



How well did alumni feel their Dallas College education prepared them for a successful career?⁶

Alumni across all credential completion categories were more likely than not to feel their Dallas College education *somewhat* and very positively contributed to various career preparation experiences. Although associate degree completers found their education to reap the greatest value in regard to career preparation and success, those who did not earn a credential still believed their academic experience at Dallas College made a difference in their professional endeavors.

⁵ Note that responses are question-specific. Rows may not sum to exactly 100% due to rounding.

⁶ Note that responses are question-specific. Labels not included for responses of ≤ 1%. Rows may not sum to exactly 100% due to rounding.

Figure 8.1. Dallas College Education and Career Preparation – All Students

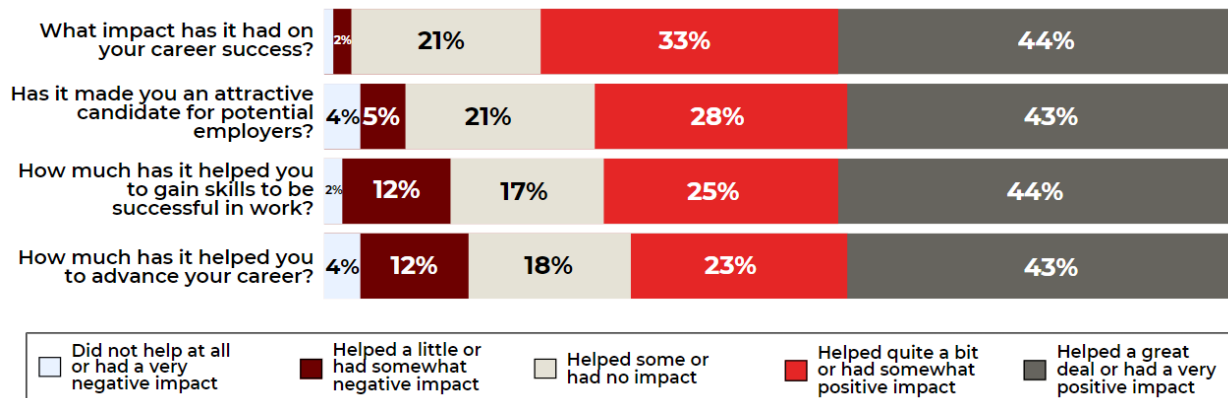


Figure 8.2. Dallas College Education and Career Preparation – Associate Completers

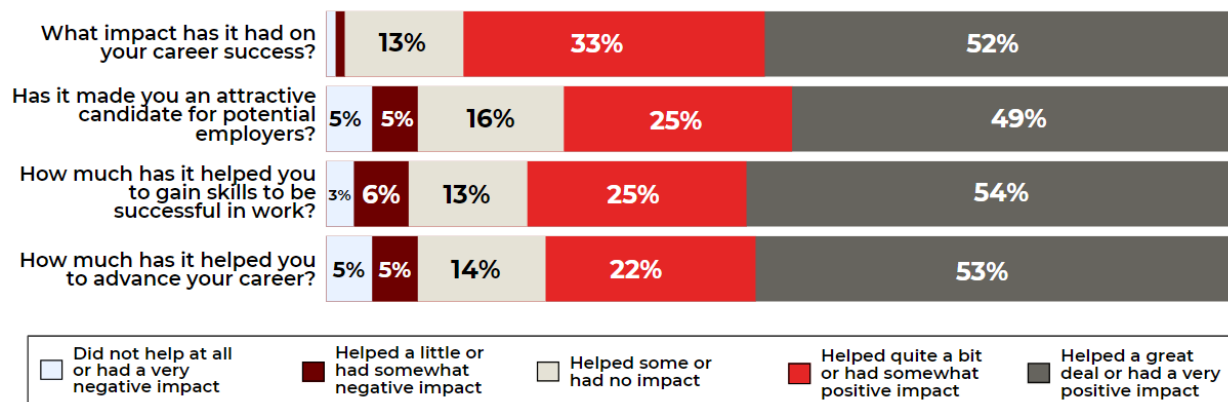


Figure 8.3. Dallas College Education and Career Preparation – Certificate Completers

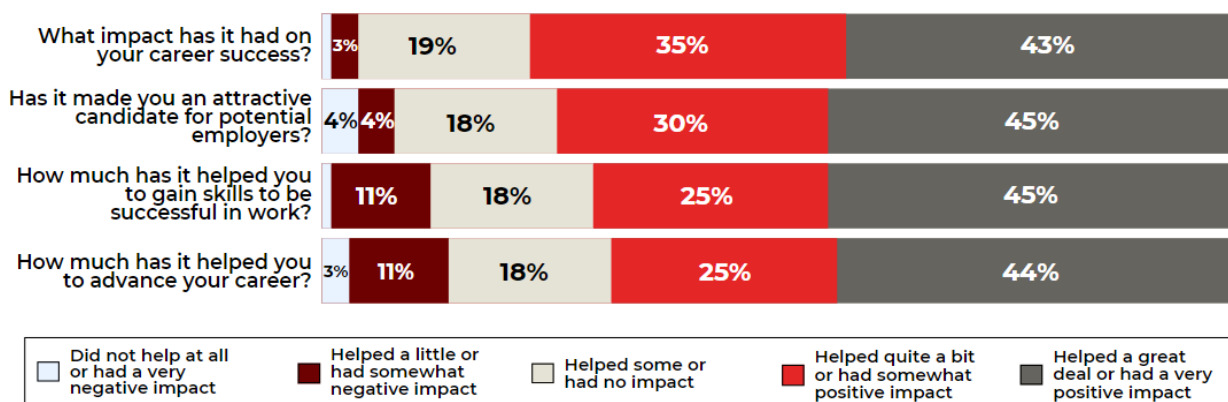
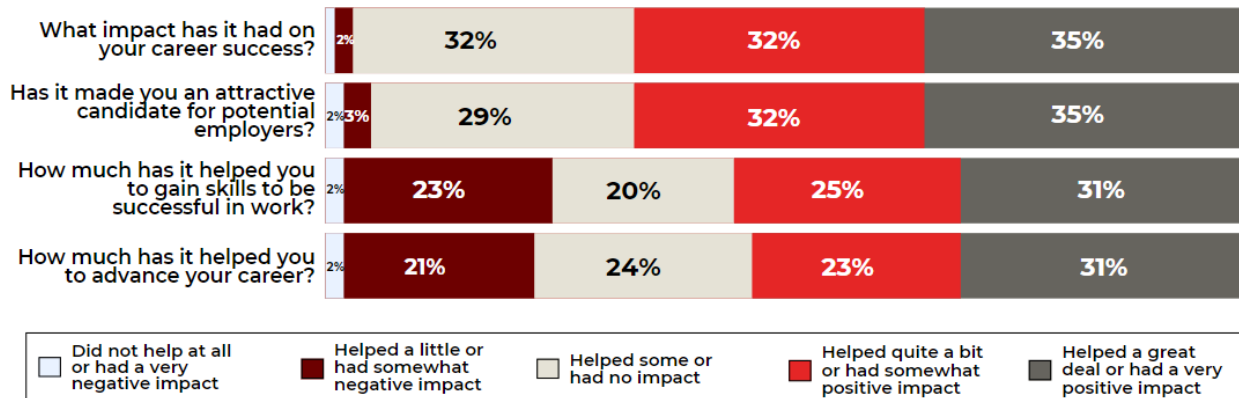


Figure 8.4. Dallas College Education and Career Preparation – No Dallas College Credential (Including Both Transfers and Some College, No Degree)



What were the employment and income outcomes of alumni?

Associate degree completers were less likely to be employed full-time in comparison to certificate completers and those without a Dallas College credential. While the majority of associate degree and certificate completers had incomes of less than \$50,000 at the time they took the survey, the majority of respondents without a Dallas College credential earned \$50,000 to \$100,000, indicating their occupational placements were likely based on more advanced degrees.

Figure 9.1. Employment and Income – All Students

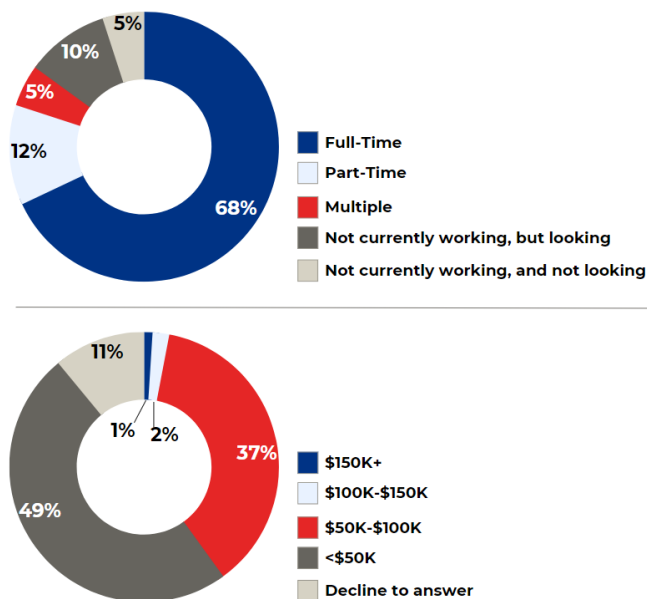


Figure 9.2. Employment and Income – Associate Completers

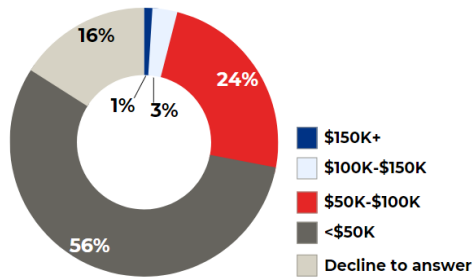
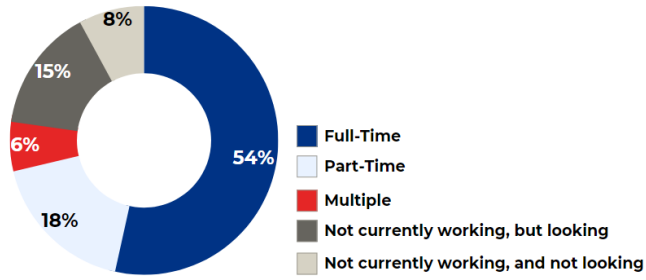


Figure 9.3. Employment and Income – Certificate Completers

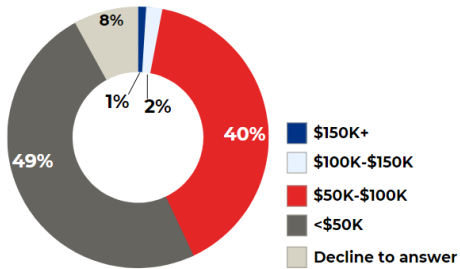
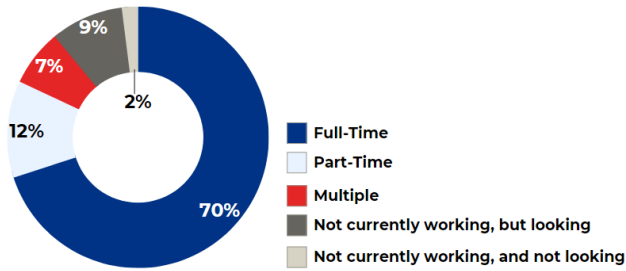
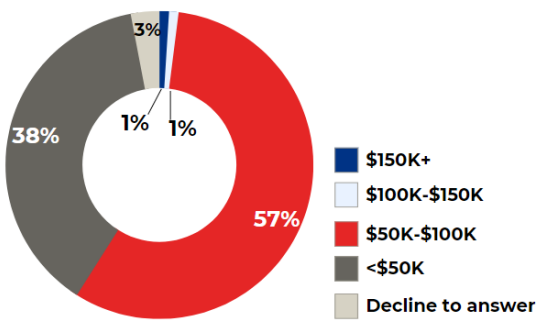
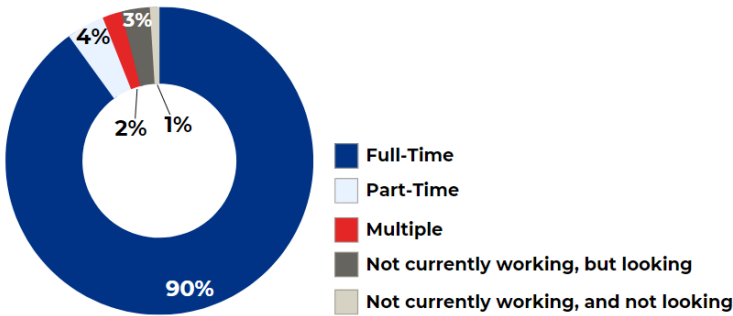


Figure 9.4. Employment and Income - No Dallas College Credential (Including Both Transfers and Some College, No Degree)



What educational credentials have alumni earned since attending Dallas College?

Alumni who did not earn a credential at Dallas College were most likely to complete a baccalaureate degree in comparison to the other groups, which implies a significant proportion of non-completers transferred to four-year institutions. In comparison to associate degree completers, certificate completers were more likely to obtain a baccalaureate degree and subsequent graduate credentials since completing their education at Dallas College.

Figure 10.1. Educational Attainment Since Dallas College – All Students

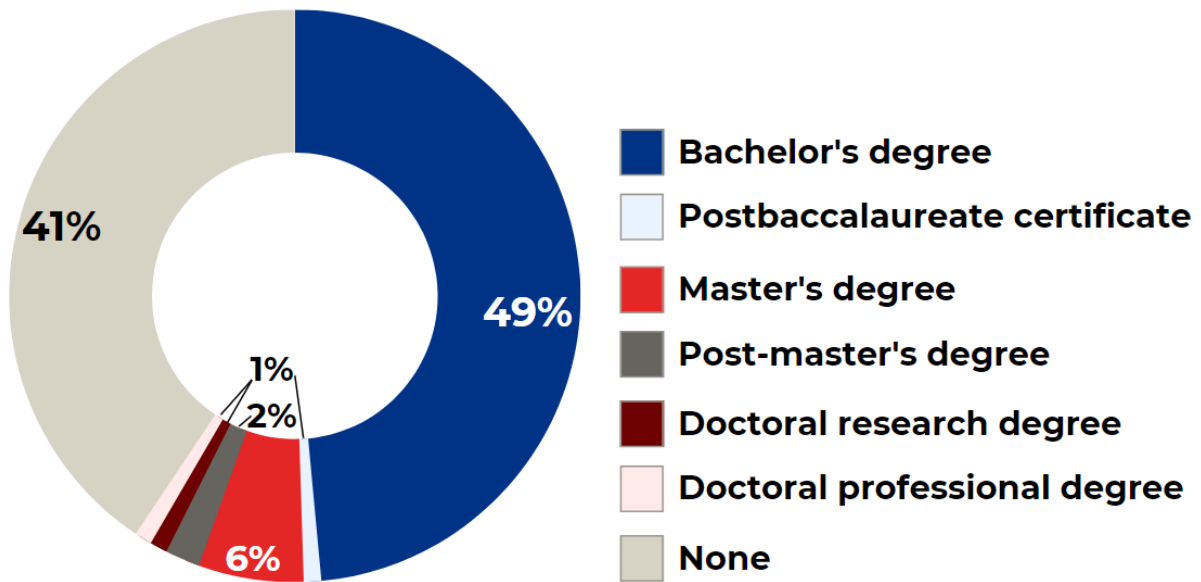


Figure 10.2. Educational Attainment Since Dallas College – Associate Completers

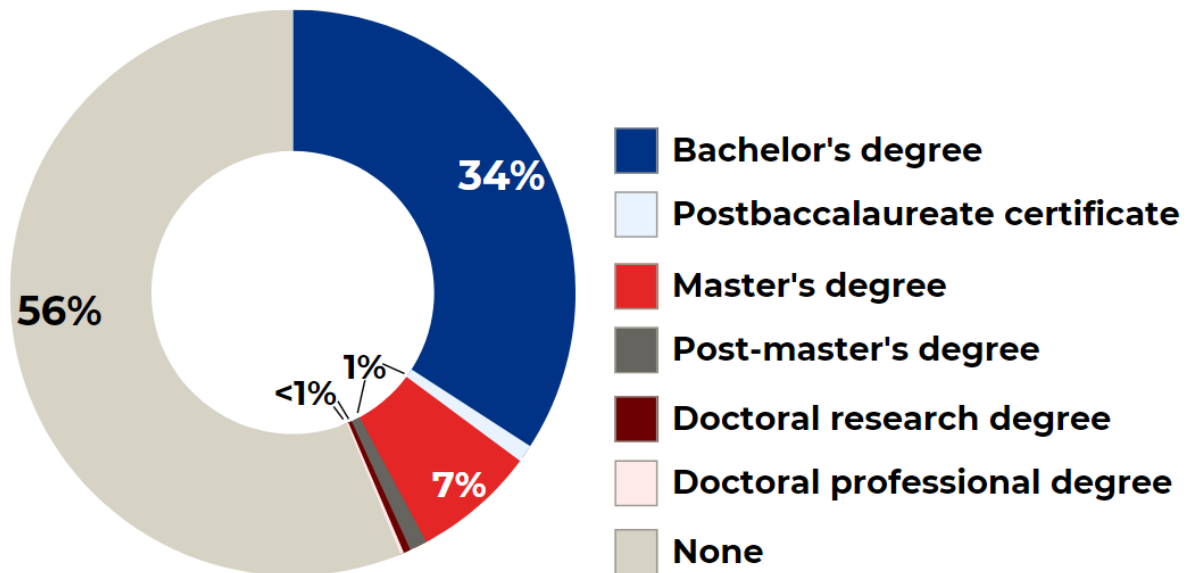


Figure 10.3. Educational Attainment Since Dallas College – Certificate Completers

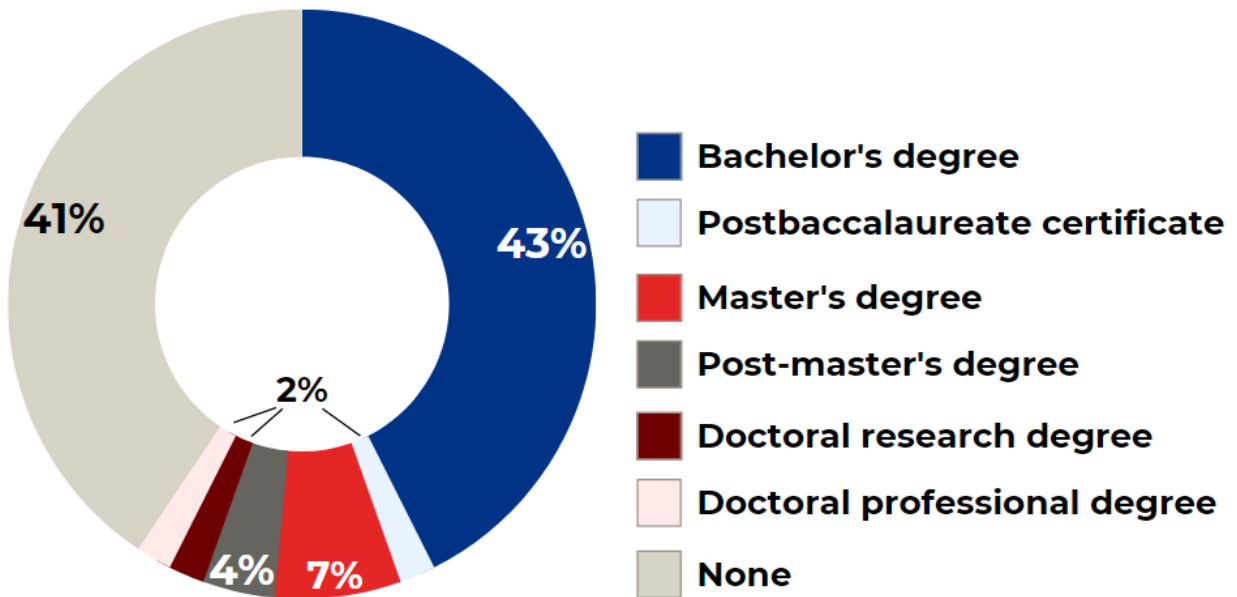
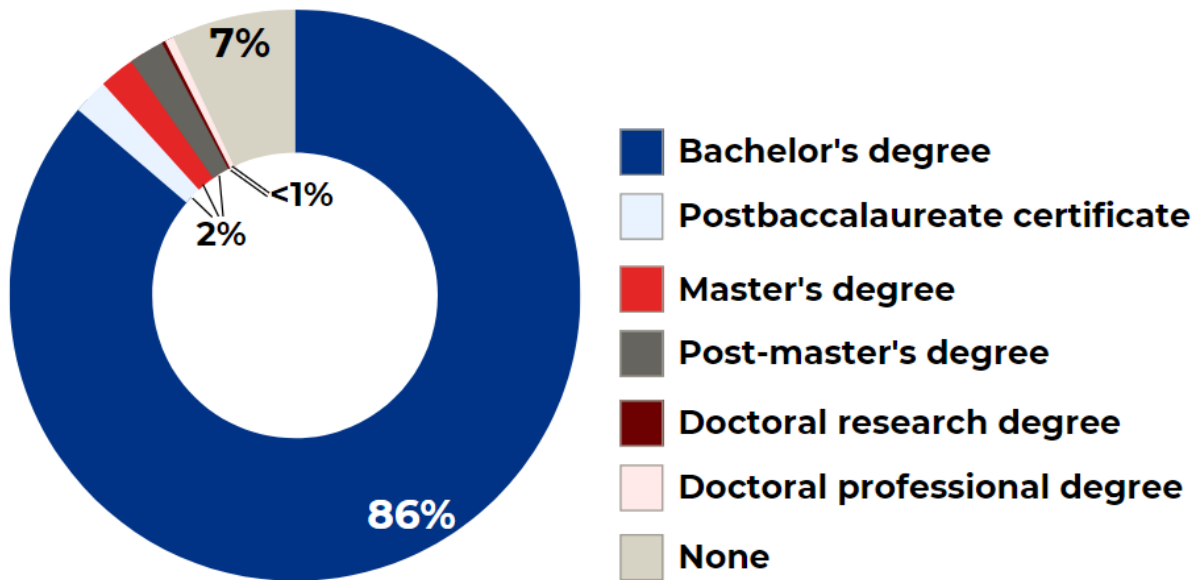


Figure 10.4. Educational Attainment Since Dallas College – No Dallas College Credential (Including Both Transfers and Some College, No Degree)



What were the occupations of alumni?

At the time of the survey, the primary category of work in which Dallas College alumni overall, certificate completers, and those without a Dallas College credential were employed was

production, transportation, and material moving. Associate degree completers were primarily employed in healthcare and education.

Figure 11.1. Alumni Occupations – All Students

Current Occupation	Percent
Production, transportation, and material moving	34%
Healthcare	11%
Education, training, and library	9%
Business and financial operations	8%
Office and administrative support	6%
Sales and related	6%
Computer, engineering, and science	5%
Other	21%

Figure 11.2. Alumni Occupations – Associate Completers

Current Occupation	Percent
Healthcare	17%
Education, training, and library	14%
Business and financial operations	11%
Sales and related	10%
Office and Administrative Support	8%
Computer, engineering, and science	8%
Community service, social service, legal, arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media	6%
Other	27%

Figure 11.3. Alumni Occupations – Certificate Completers

Current Occupation	Percent
Production, transportation, and material moving	36%
Business and financial operations	10%
Education, training, and library	9%
Healthcare	8%
Computer, engineering, and science	7%
Office and administrative support	7%
Other	23%

Figure 11.3. Alumni Occupations – No Dallas College Credential (Including Both Transfers and Some College, No Degree)

Current Occupation	Percent
Production, transportation, and material moving	76%
Other	24%

Recommendations

- Dallas College must continue to maximize its efforts in fostering marketable skills, including both occupation-specific skills relating to particular fields of study as well as transferable skills that can be used in a variety of careers across distinct fields. Investing in and expanding experiential learning opportunities such as the [Marketable Skills Faculty Integrators](#) will help students link their academic skills to employability skills.
- Given current labor market demands, associate degrees and certificates may not on their own be sufficient for obtaining well-paying jobs in most occupational areas. A recent Research Institute study on [transfer pathways and economic mobility](#) indicates that economic gains from vertical transfer are closely tied to completing a bachelor's degree; four-year graduates earn above living, and often economic mobility, wage thresholds across all programs of study. Success coaches and career advisors can change student perceptions of the labor market value of credentials below the baccalaureate level, encourage students to pursue bachelor's degrees and more advanced credentials, and guide students in transitioning from Dallas College to the next step—whether that is transferring to a four-year program that

aligns with their Dallas College program of study or searching for and identifying jobs for which they qualify with their Dallas College credential.

- More efforts to connect alumni to employers and other graduates in their fields can improve their career outlook and/or clarify next-step decisions to prepare for desired occupations.
- Cyclical assessments of alumni perceptions and post-graduation outcomes can track graduates' pathways and monitor whether the perceived value of a Dallas College education is improving or declining over time. As part of this effort, the semesterly administration of the [First Destination Survey](#) beginning in Fall 2024 provides timely insights into the short-term experiences and perceptions of recent graduates.
- Further qualitative and quantitative research examining the trajectories of associate degree and certificate completers as well as transfer students will help determine fundamental differences in these student groups' perceptions, motivations, and desired outcomes in higher education.

Conclusion

In comparison to attitudes of community college students across the nation toward their respective institutions, Dallas College alumni from 2012-2022 regarded their education and experiences at the College quite positively. Dallas College alumni perceptions on the overall benefits of academic, career, community, and support experiences, financial value, career preparation and satisfaction, skills development, affinity, and life impact from their alma mater across all credential completion levels generally surpassed the perceptions of a nationally representative sample of community college students toward their two-year institutions. Findings also indicate that across all credential categories, including no credential/degree earned, alumni, on the whole, held positive views on the value of their Dallas College education. Interestingly, associate degree completers responded to questions related to value and impact more positively than certificate completers and those who did not earn a credential at Dallas College. However, on outcomes such as *employment status, earnings, and further attainment of higher education credentials*, associate degree completers performed less positively than respondents in other credential level categories, including those without a Dallas College credential. This implies that the student experience at Dallas College has been complex—perhaps particularly so for associate degree seekers; for many former students, value may have been assessed more on the basis of individualized motivations and goals than traditional measures of postsecondary education success such as career advancement and monetary returns.

Two nuances in the Strada survey data need further explanation. First, while the report is organized by levels of credential completion, one caveat to note regarding the “No Dallas College Credential” category is that 1) it includes students with some college but no degree or credential attained up to present-day as well as students who completed some courses and transferred to four-year (or other two-year) institutions, and 2) more transfer students than some college/no degree students exist in this category in the survey data. A greater proportion of transfer respondents in the “No Dallas College Credential” category suggests that the outcomes related to educational attainment post-Dallas College, employment status, and earnings were relatively higher for this group compared to certificate and associate completers, as these individuals likely earned baccalaureate degrees, placed in stable, full-time occupations, and earned higher wages. As indicated in the figures related to education completed since attending Dallas College, 86% of respondents without a credential from the institution proceeded to earn a bachelor’s, while only 34% of associate completers and 43% of certificate completers earned this credential. With current income, 57% of respondents without a credential from Dallas College earned between \$50,000 and \$100,000, while 24% of associate degree holders and 40% of certificate holders fell within this earnings bracket. Outcomes for full-time employment status followed the same pattern.

Findings from the Strada pilot alumni survey must be interpreted with the understanding that the results reflect the responses of a self-selected group of former students who were not completely representative of the Dallas College alumni population from the past ten years. Specifically, White and non-Hispanic/Latino demographic groups and transfers to four-year institutions were overrepresented in the data in comparison to actual counts of these student groups attending Dallas College from 2012 to 2022. Despite such limitations, the survey data captured a wide range of meaningful measures that depicted the motivations, experiences, and outcomes of a heterogenous subset of Dallas College’s alumni, including alumni who were current employees of Dallas College (roughly 5.3% of survey participants). To advance alumni outcome research at Dallas College, the Strada Community College Outcomes Survey was the first institution-wide effort to collect comprehensive, student-level outcomes data from individuals who attended the college over a twenty-year period. This initiative has supported the development of more continuous data collection efforts, such as the First Destination Survey, and will inform the design of future instruments aimed at capturing alumni reflections on their educational experiences and labor market outcomes.

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We envision a Dallas College that consistently grounds its strategic decisions in high-quality research and, as a result, serves as a national exemplar in supporting the long-term success and wellbeing of its students.



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