

# DETC

Degree Programs



Graduates and Employers  
Evaluate Their Worth

2006

DETC DEGREE PROGRAMS: GRADUATES AND EMPLOYERS EVALUATE THEIR WORTH

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The Distance Education and Training Council (DETC) is a non-profit, voluntary accrediting association of distance education institutions. The Council was founded in 1926 to promote sound educational standards and ethical business practices with the distance study field. The DETC Accrediting Commission 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).

## **Foreword**

In March 2006 the Distance Education and Training Council surveyed graduates of 31 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 First Professional 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 2001 and published in a report entitled, “Accredited Distance Study Degrees: Graduates and Employers Evaluate Their Worth.” A comparison of the data from three surveys is included.

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 1,900 graduates were surveyed. The response rate was 25 percent on the graduate survey. Forty-four percent of those responding let us survey their employers. 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.

<sup>1</sup> Some institutions provided fewer than 100 names.

## Survey Method

The DETC asked 31 of its U.S.-based accredited degree-granting institutions to submit the names and addresses of a random sampling of graduates from the degree program(s). In all, 1,918 names were submitted. In March 2006, a survey with a return envelope was mailed to each of the names.

A total of 96 envelopes were returned as “undeliverable.” A total of 480 responses were returned to DETC, making the response rate 25 percent. This percent is considered excellent in mail surveys of this type, since the surveys were anonymous and there were no follow-up mailings to the non-respondents.

A separate survey of the graduates’ supervisors was mailed. One hundred and four graduates gave permission for DETC to survey their supervisors. Forty-six supervisors responded to the survey, giving an excellent response rate of 44 percent.

## Survey Summary

According to the results of the 2006 survey, graduates of academic degree programs offered by accredited DETC member institutions the following emerged:

1. The largest percentage (20%) are ages 41-45, and the largest percentage (12%) make \$61-71,000 per year.
2. Twenty-six percent of the degrees awarded are at the Associate degree level; 27% are Bachelor degrees; 37% are Master’s degrees, 7% Juris Doctor, and 3% First Professional Degree. It took an average of 3.4 years to earn a degree.
3. Graduates selected the distance study method because it was the most convenient way for them (25%) to earn a degree. Other reasons given for electing to study by distance education were: work schedule or flexibility (18%), family constraints or availability (9%), study at your own pace (11%), costs less (3%), and other (34%).

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4. Twenty-eight percent earned their distance study degree by using the paper-based method; 28% used online, and 42% used both online and paper-based method.
5. Ninety-eight percent said that the information they received before enrolling accurately described the degree program.
6. Seventy-one percent said that the information they received accurately described the future acceptability of the degree or academic credits by other institutions (21% were unsure).
7. Ninety-eight percent said that they received appropriate information about policies, procedures, support services, and cost for the program (1% were unsure).
8. Ninety-three percent said their experience with the degree program matched their expectations (3% were unsure).
9. Ninety-six percent thought that the course material was sufficiently comprehensive to satisfy their learning goals (2% were unsure).
10. 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?" 90% said that it was same or more difficult.
11. Ninety-eight percent said that they felt challenged by the level of difficulty of the course(s).
12. When asked to rate the depth of knowledge and teaching competence of the faculty, 98% rated it adequate or superior.
13. Ninety-eight percent said that the faculty reflected an adequate understanding of the course materials.
14. When asked, "Was there sufficient communication with the instructor to meet your goals?" 84% said "Yes," and 5% were unsure.

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15. Ninety-nine percent found the examinations and assigned projects to adequately test their understanding of the subject.
16. Ninety-seven percent rated their overall satisfaction with the instruction services as adequate or superior.
17. Ninety-eight percent rated their access to other learning resources that they needed to complete the program as adequate or superior.
18. The majority (73%) 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 get a job promotion.”
19. The majority (76%) 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.”
20. Ninety-eight percent said that they thought the degree program was adequate or superior in providing them with the knowledge, skills, and education they were seeking.
21. Ninety-three percent said that they thought the degree they earned was worth the effort required (4% weren’t sure).
22. Forty-seven percent received an increase in their income due to earning their degree.
23. Thirty-seven percent had a job promotion or change in careers that improved their life as a result of earning their degree.
24. The majority (61%) did not try to transfer their credits to another academic institution. Seventeen percent were able to have their degree or credits transfer to another institution.

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25. If they tried to have their degree accepted by other academic institutions, 69% were successful in transferring credits.
26. Ninety-eight percent rated their satisfaction with the degree programs as adequate or superior.
27. Ninety-two percent said that they would recommend the degree program to a friend.
28. Seventy-one percent said that they would enroll in another distance education degree program (21% weren't sure).
29. The most common "strong points" given concerning their experience with the distance study method were:
  - Flexibility, convenience
  - Able to study at your own pace
30. The most common "weak points" given concerning their experience with the distance study method were:
  - Not enough student-to-student interaction
  - Hard to get in touch with faculty
  - Not recognized by other institutions
  - Time delays (mail)

## **Supervisor Survey Results**

In a separate survey of the graduates' supervisors (21% elected to have their supervisors surveyed by DETC; 44% of the supervisors responded), the following emerged:

1. Ninety-three percent of the supervisors knew this employee had earned an academic degree by distance education.
2. One-hundred percent of the supervisors said compared to other individuals they supervise or know who have earned "resident school" degrees of a comparable nature, this person compares favorably in terms of equivalent knowledge, skills, and attitude.
3. Eighty-seven percent said that they think this person performs better on the job because of the degree earned.
4. Eighty-three percent said that they are favorably inclined toward hiring or supervising other employees who have earned their degrees by distance education.
5. Ninety-three percent said they would encourage others, such as subordinates or colleagues, to enroll in accredited distance education degree programs to increase their job competence.
6. When asked from their 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, 96% said more or just as valuable (4% were not sure).

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### Comparison

Below is a comparison of similar questions from the 1994, 2001 and 2006 surveys. Once again it shows that compared to the 1994 and 2001 graduates, the average degree earner in 2006 is older, earns more money, attains a higher degree, and is satisfied with the degree program:

		<b>1994</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2006</b>
Number of Institutions surveyed		10	21	31
Number of surveys mailed		674	1,353	1,918
Response Rate		24%	18%	25%
Largest percentage of:	Age 26-30	34%	9%	11%
	Age 31-35	14%	12%	13%
	Age 36-40	20%	19%	14%
	Age 41-45	14%	22%	20%
	Age 46-50	9%	12%	17%
Income (in thousands)	<\$20,000	21%	5%	4%
	\$21-30,000	22%	6%	6%
	\$31-40	25%	15%	10%
	\$41-50	15%	13%	9%
	\$51-60	11%	17%	10%
	\$61-70	6%	17%	12%
	\$71-80		7%	10%
	\$81-90		6%	10%
	\$91-100		4%	9%
	\$101-110		2%	6%
	\$111-120		0%	3%
\$120+		8%	11%	
Institutions awarding:				
- associate degrees		71%	21%	26%
- bachelor degrees		18%	36%	27%
- master's degrees		11%	39%	37%
- juris doctor				7%
- first professional				3%

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	<b>1994</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2006</b>
<b>Average time to earn degree:</b>			
- associate	3	3	3.5
- bachelor's	4	4	2.6
- master's	2	3	2.8
- juris doctor			3.75
- first professional			4.2
<b>Reasons for taking earning distance education degree:</b>			
- convenience	36%	33%	25%
- work schedule	33%	27%	18%
- family constraints	12%	12%	9%
- study at your own pace	10%	8%	11%
- costs less	6%	6%	3%
- availability	3%	11%	9%
- other	0%	3%	34%
Course material was sufficiently comprehensive	94%	97%	96%
Same or more difficult when compared to classroom to classroom education	89%	94%	90%
Felt challenged by level of difficulty	99%	96%	98%
Knowledge and teaching competence of faculty	98%	99%	98%
Faculty reflected adequate understanding of material	98%	99%	98%
Examinations and projects adequately tests	98%	94%	99%
Overall satisfaction with instructional services as adequate or better	95%	98%	97%
<b>Reasons for enrolling (high)</b>			
- personal satisfaction	77%	74%	73%
- improve job skills	65%	46%	41%
- learn more about subject	76%	58%	56%
- obtain credentials	57%	37%	44%
- earn more money	22%	22%	25%
- get a promotion	22%	27%	22%
- prepare for a new job	32%	28%	22%
- qualify for professional license	32%	18%	34%

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	<b>1994</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2006</b>
Benefits from obtaining degree (high)			
- personal satisfaction	79%	78%	76%
- proper credentials	47%	40%	45%
- enjoyment of learning	65%	44%	49%
- improve job skills	62%	32%	38%
- qualify for professional license	31%	14%	20%
- job promotion	37%	22%	22%
- increase in income	23%	22%	26%
- access to higher degree	45%	41%	44%
Rated extent degree provided knowledge, skills and education they were seeking adequate or better	95%	99%	98%
Said degree was worth the effort	96%	95%	93%
Had increase in income due to degree	37%	54%	47%
Had job promotion or change in careers	38%	50%	37%
Overall rating of degree program as adequate or better	99%	99%	98%

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### **Comparison of Supervisor Survey**

<b>Supervisors—</b>	<b>1994</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2006</b>
Knew that student earned degree through distance education	84%	91%	93%
Said graduate compared favorable with resident-school	94%	91%	100%
Said graduate performs better on job	81%	91%	87%
Would hire other graduates of distance education programs	92%	84%	83%
Would encourage others to enroll in distance education programs	97%	94%	93%
Rate value of degree as compared to resident degree:			
- more valuable	14%	13%	11%
- just as valuable	70%	56%	85%
- less valuable	5%	13%	0%
- not sure	11%	18%	4%

## Response Rate by Institution

Institution	Surveys Mailed	Surveys Received <sup>1</sup>	Response Rate
American College of Computer & Info. Sciences	100	28	28%
American Graduate School of Management	8	3	38%
American Graduate University	100	25	25%
American Public University System	98	22	22%
Andrew Jackson University	78	17	22%
Ashworth College	100	35	35%
Aspen University	70	11	16%
Atlantic University	65	17	26%
California Coast University	100	31	31%
CA National University for Advanced Studies	51	0	0%
Cardean University	25	2	8%
Catholic Distance University	25	8	32%
Cleveland Institute of Electronics	81	18	22%
College of the Humanities and Sciences	8	3	38%
Columbia Southern University	100	31	31%
Concord Law School	100	27	27%
Global University	26	11	42%
Grantham University	75	7	9%
Holmes Institute	55	0	0%
Huntington College of Health Sciences	35	11	31%
IMPAC University	42	12	29%
Independence University	100	29	29%
Paralegal Institute	100	16	16%

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

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<b>Institution</b>	<b>Surveys Mailed</b>	<b>Surveys Received<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Response Rate</b>
Penn Foster College	100	23	23%
Rescue College	10	3	30%
Southwest University	59	24	41%
University of Management and Technology	68	9	13%
University of St. Augustine for Health Sciences	80	14	18%
Western Governors University	100	26	26%
William Howard Taft University	40	10	25%
World College	19	7	37%

Number of Institutions Participating: 31<sup>2</sup>

Total Surveys Mailed: 1,918 - 96 Undeliverable = 1,892

Total Surveys Received: 480

Response Rate: 44%

(<sup>2</sup>Please note that presently there are 51 degree-granting institutions accredited. Twenty institutions were not counted in this survey because they didn't submit labels, they are international-based, they only enroll international students, or they just recently were accredited.)

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

## Final Results of the 2006 Graduate Survey

Institutions Participating: 31

Number of Surveys Mailed: 1,918 – 96 (undeliverable) = 1,892

Total Received and Counted: 408 (25% Return)

Number of Employers Surveyed: 104 - 0 (undeliverable) = 104

Number Received: 46 (44% Return)

Age: (in percentages)

0%	18 – 20	17%	46-50
4%	21 – 25	10%	51-55
11%	26 – 30	7%	56-60
13%	31 – 35	3%	61-65
14%	36 – 40	.6%	66-70
20%	41 – 45	.4%	71+

Annual Income (in thousands):

4%	\$10-20	10%	\$71-80
6%	\$21-30	10%	\$81-90
10%	\$31-40	9%	\$91-100
9%	\$41-50	6%	\$101-110
10%	\$51-60	3%	111-120
12%	\$61-70	11%	\$120+

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

26% = Associate Degrees      27% = Bachelor Degrees      37% = Master's  
7% = Juris Doctor      3% = First Professional Degree

2. How long did it take you to earn your degree?      AVERAGE: 3.4 Years

Associate Degrees = 3.5 years      Juris Doctor = 3.75  
Bachelor Degrees = 2.6 years      First Professional Degree = 4.2  
Master's Degree = 2.8 years

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

25% = Convenience      18% = Work Schedule  
9% = Family Constraints      11% = Study at own pace  
3% = Costs less      34% = Other

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4. Was this program offered: 28% = online 28% = paper-based 42% = both
5. Did the information you received before enrolling accurately describe the degree program?  
Yes = 98%      No = 2%      Unsure = 0%
6. Did the information accurately describe the future acceptability of the degree or academic credits by other institutions:  
Yes = 71%      No = 8%      Unsure = 21%
7. Did you receive appropriate information about policies, procedures, support services, and costs for the program?  
Yes = 98%      No = 1%      Unsure = 1%
8. Did your experience with the degree program match your expectations?  
Yes = 93%      No = 4%      Unsure = 3%
9. Did you think the course material was sufficiently comprehensive to satisfy your learning goals?  
Yes = 96%      No = 2%      Unsure = 2%
10. 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 = 37%      less difficult = 8%  
comparable = 53%      unable to compare the two = 2%
11. Were you challenged by the level of difficulty of the course(s)?  
always = 53%      sometimes = 45%      not usually = 2%

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12. How would you rate the depth of knowledge and teaching competence of the faculty?

superior = 49%                      inadequate = 2%  
adequate = 49%                      very inadequate = 0%

13. Did assistance you received from faculty reflect an adequate understanding of the course materials?

always = 77%                      sometimes = 21%                      not usually = 2%

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

Yes = 84%                      No = 11%                      Unsure = 5%

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

in most cases = 74%                      sometimes = 25%                      not usually = 1%

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

superior = 63%                      inadequate = 2%  
adequate = 34%                      very inadequate = 1%

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 your access to other learning resources that you needed to complete the program:

superior = 46%                      inadequate = 2%  
adequate = 52%                      very inadequate = 0%

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

	LOW				HIGH
	1	2	3	4	5
<i>(in percentages)</i>					
earn more money	13	13	24	25	25
get a promotion	20	13	23	22	22
prepare for new job	14	10	22	24	30
improve job skills	6	5	16	32	41
qualify for professional license	26	13	21	16	24
obtain credential	11	5	16	24	44
personal satisfaction	1	1	7	18	73
learn more about subject	4	3	13	24	56

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

	LOW				HIGH
	1	2	3	4	5
<i>(in percentages)</i>					
personal satisfaction	0	1	6	17	76
proper credentials	4	4	19	28	45
enjoyment of learning	1	2	14	34	49
improve job skills	4	5	20	33	38
qualify for professional license	25	12	25	16	20
job promotion	20	12	25	21	22
increase in income	15	10	26	23	26
access to higher degree	13	6	17	20	44

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

superior = 57%	inadequate = 2%
adequate = 41%	very inadequate = 0%

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

Yes = 93%      No = 3%      Not sure = 4%

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

Yes, a significant amount = 18%

Yes, a modest amount = 29%

No increase = 53%

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

Yes = 37%      No = 63%

24. Have you tried to have your credits or degree work accepted by other academic institutions?

Yes = 17%      No = 22%      Haven't tried = 61%

If No, why not?

- terminal degree    - not ready to continue    - no need    - don't want to

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

Yes = 69%      No = 31%

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

superior = 67%      inadequate = 1%

adequate = 31%      very inadequate = 1%

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

Yes = 92%      No = 8%

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

Yes = 71%      No = 8%      Not sure = 21%

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

Examples:

- Flexibility, convenience
- Able to study at your own pace

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

Examples:

- not enough student-to-student interaction
- hard to get in touch with faculty
- not recognized by other institutions
- slow response from faculty

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

Examples:

- I am very satisfied
- I learned more this way than traditionally -- I tripled my income
- This was the best think I've ever done

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

Yes = 21%      No = 79%

## Final Results of Supervisor Survey

Graduates who gave permission to survey their supervisor: 104 (21%)

Number of Surveys Mailed: 104

Number of Surveys Received: 46 (44% response rate)

1. Before receiving this letter, did you know that this person had earned an academic degree by distance education?  
Yes = 93%      No = 7%
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 = 100%      No = 0%
3. Do you think that this person performs better on the job because of the degree earned?  
Yes = 87%      No = 13%
4. Are you favorably inclined toward hiring or supervising other employees who have earned their degrees by distance education?  
Yes = 83%      No = 17%
5. Would you encourage others such as subordinates or colleagues to enroll in accredited distance education degree programs to increase their job competence?  
Yes = 93%      No = 7%
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 = 11%  
Just as valuable = 85%  
Less valuable = 0%  
Not sure = 4%

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

- Distance Education provides the flexibility that some people need, considering the demands of family, life and work. It works well for those people who do not work well in a traditional setting.
- Outstanding program! It allowed employees to work full time and fill her role as mother and wife and to obtain her college degree.
- This student is one of our top performers!
- This person has a high degree of self-directed focus. Such programs are most effective with people who set goals and priorities and follow through. This person's excellent work ethic made the distance learning process very effective for her.
- The convenience of online education far outweighs the drawbacks.
- A distance education degree reflects more strongly on an individual's initiative and character than the institution's providing a means of earning a degree. This person's initiative and character validate your institution's degree program more than your degree program the individual.
- It takes a person with a special commitment to exercise the discipline necessary for a distance education.
- Although I believe there is value in attending traditional classrooms, I feel as if the online curriculum is challenging and instructive. It is also a great option for working professionals.
- The degree has enhanced her effectiveness and her performance on the job.
- I obtained my masters degree through distance learning as well.
- I received my second masters degree myself (army war college, master of strategic studies '02) so [I] know the full value of education gained in this manner.
- Distance learning is a valuable tool for anyone with a family & a busy schedule.
- I have had both residential and distance learning courses. Both were valuable. The down side of distance learning is less interaction with classmates and instructors.





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