



First Destination Alumni Survey: Class of 2020

Introduction: The First Destination Alumni Survey is designed to help Paul Smith’s College (PSC) track the initial career placement of recent graduates. The First Destination Alumni Survey results are used by the College to gauge the career success of PSC graduates within the first six months post-graduation and to adjust academic programming as needed.

Methodology: The 2020 First Destination Alumni Survey was administered to all August 2019, December 2019, and May 2020 graduates in four different modes. First, the survey was administered to associate-seeking sophomores and baccalaureate-seeking seniors participating in the December and May graduation ceremonies. Second, a paper survey was distributed by mail to all graduates. Third, an email was sent to all non-responders with an online survey link. Lastly, student workers and professional staff in the Center for Academic & Career Success placed calls or engaged in social media communications to track down as many non-responders as possible before closing out the results. A total of 182 graduates were administered the survey, and we have collected 111 total responses with a 61% response rate. We typically close out the First Destination Alumni Survey when we reach between a 70 – 80% response rate. Our response rate was significantly lower than in previous years, but this could be attributed to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic during the period of data collection, which impeded our survey efforts. Additionally, we saw a decline in response rate from Associate Degree graduates, but this population of students is continuing to decline as compared to our four-year students.

Class of 2020 Response Rates

	Class of 2020	Baccalaureate Degree Graduates	Associate Degree Graduates
Total Graduates Surveyed	182	141	41
Respondents to Survey	111	91	20
Response Rate	61%	66%	49%

Results:

Employment and Further Education:

In the tables below, you can see that our current placement rate for respondents of the 2020 First Destination Survey is 89%, with 75% of respondents employed and 14% pursuing further education. Our success rate continues to be slightly lower than our historical data, but again this is likely attributed to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and changes in survey methodology. We also saw a higher percentage of students pursuing higher education, which is typically seen during tough economic periods, which we experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. More specifically, 89% of Baccalaureate degree respondents to the survey are employed or pursuing further education. For Associate degree

respondents, the placement rate comes in at approximately 90%. An interesting trend is a significant uptick in our Associate Degree graduates pursuing further education with nearly 30% of respondents seeking a higher degree.

Class of 2020 Overall Placement Rates and Comparison

5-Year Response Rates	Class of 2020	Class of 2019	Class of 2018	Class of 2017	Class of 2016
Total Employed	75%	77%	84%	75%	91%
Total Further Education	14%	8%	6%	8%	7%
Overall Employed or Further Education	89%	85%	90%	83%	98%

Class of 2020 Placement Data by Degree Level

By Degree Level	Baccalaureate Degree Graduates	Associate Degree Graduates
Total Employed	78%	60%
Total Further Education	11%	30%
Overall Employed or Further Education	89%	90%

Salary: Only 12% of respondents reported salary or wage information. This decline in response when it comes to wage could be due to difficulties in employment brought on by the pandemic, and the fact that most of our responses came from online reports, which provides limited details. The details of the reported salaries are outlined in the table below with the average salary of 2020 graduates being \$36,456.

Reported Salary of all Respondents	
Median	\$35,360
Average	\$36,456
Low	\$19,200
High	\$70,000

Satisfaction Data: Graduates were also asked about how satisfied they were with their PSC education. Approximately 15% of respondents completed the satisfaction portion of the survey, a significant decrease from past years. Percentages below are based on the number of responses submitted for each question. Respondents to the survey had high satisfaction outcomes, but more data could be collected

from the NSSE survey. Comments were also collected for each response and shared with appropriate personnel.

	Yes	Unsure	No
Satisfied with PSC (Yes, No, Unsure)	70%	12%	18%
Satisfied with PSC Major (Yes, No, Unsure)	82%	0%	18%

Summary:

Outcomes from the 2020 First Destination Alumni Survey continue to be different compared to previous years under old administration practices. We continue to believe this is related to our methodology changes for survey administration, but also realize that changes in distribution may not explain the full picture, especially considering the differences between the graduating outcomes for the last five years. We have gone through tremendous changes in how we provide career support having moved from an employer-focused office to a much more integrated and student-centered approach. The class of 2018 was the first graduating cohort to be impacted by these changes, and we have continued to shift staffing and engagement practices to better meet the needs of students. We believe these changes will continue to provide improved career outcomes, but more data on student usage and engagement is needed to confirm a correlation between our structural changes and our improved career outcomes. The recommendations below aim to identify a means for accomplishing this, along with better alignment of career support with the academic curriculum, and finally continued assessment of effectiveness with regards to our systems, services, and events.

Additionally, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic greatly impacted our survey results. Not only did it impact our response rates and success outcomes, but staff priorities were dedicated elsewhere that normally would have been focused on completing the survey. Moving forward, we hope to have more resources dedicated toward data collection and survey completion.

Recommendations:

- Begin to use innovative technologies like Handshake to better administer and interpret the First Destination Survey and allow for a more seamless data collection method.
- Continue to work with Academic Department Chairs to identify key points in program curriculum where career support can be embedded within course requirements.
- Develop a career pathways model that guides students through a holistic career development process starting in the first year and carrying through to graduation.
- Develop a means of collecting career data on graduates 3-4 years after graduation to determine the longer-term success of PSC graduates.

