

5. Attitudes and Satisfaction with Education

The public pays for its education system and benefits from its results. While the public's opinion of the education system does not directly influence education policy, public opinion is often a factor which comes into play in educational decision making. In addition to the general interest people may have, the many constituencies which comprise the general public have different concerns: parents want an education system which enables their children to become self-fulfilled and productive members of society; business and industry want a system which produces graduates who can do the work to make their enterprises successful; politicians want a system which achieves its goals and leads to full employment; and community leaders want a system which produces graduates who are able to contribute to the well being of society.

The Department of Education through its Postsecondary Graduate Follow-up surveys polls graduates about a number of areas related to satisfaction with their education experiences and their post-graduation employment history. In addition, two surveys, one on K-12 and the other on postsecondary education were conducted in 1995 to assess public satisfaction with the a number of aspects of the system.

5.1 To what extent are graduates satisfied with their choice of program?

Although there are differences among graduates from different types of postsecondary institutions,

overwhelmingly 1993/94 and 1994/95 graduates indicated that if they had their time back they would complete the same program at the same institution (Figures 5.1.1 and 5.1.2). The highest percentage of satisfied graduates were those of graduate level programs at Memorial University (1994/95). Since students pursuing graduate

degrees have focused on their area of particular interest and are likely to have chosen Memorial because a program met their needs this finding was expected. In both survey years, graduates of private colleges were least satisfied with the programs they had completed. In each year only half (49% and 52%) indicated they would do the same program at

Figure 5.1.1: Satisfaction of Graduates with their Choice of Program, 1993/94

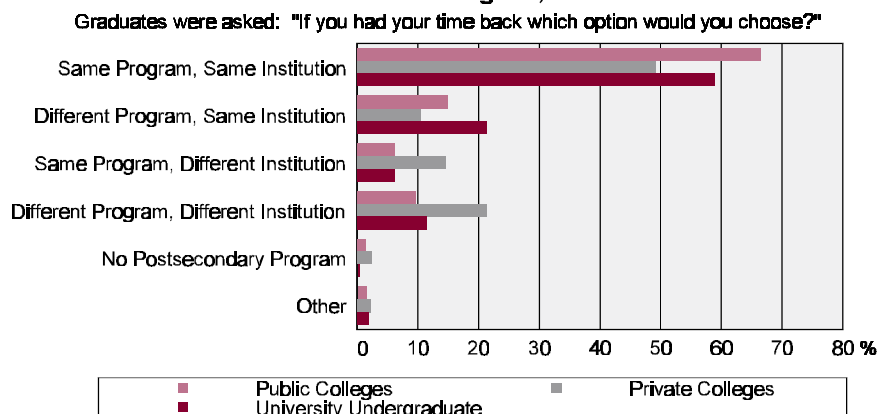
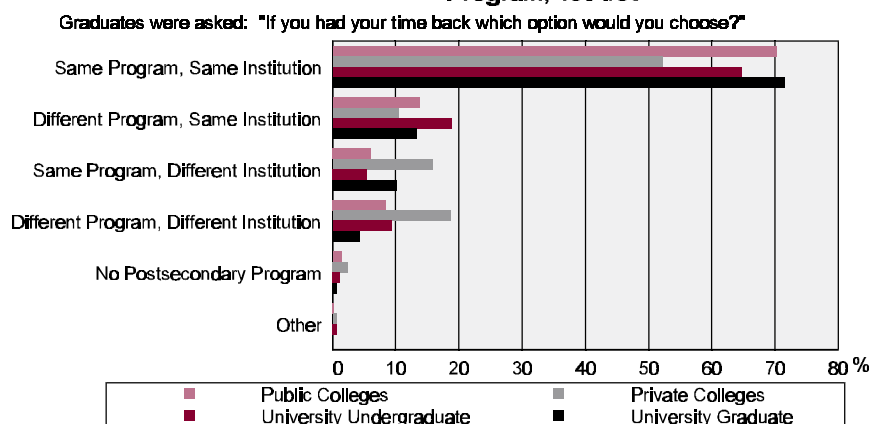


Figure 5.1.2: Satisfaction of Graduates with their Choice of Program, 1994/95

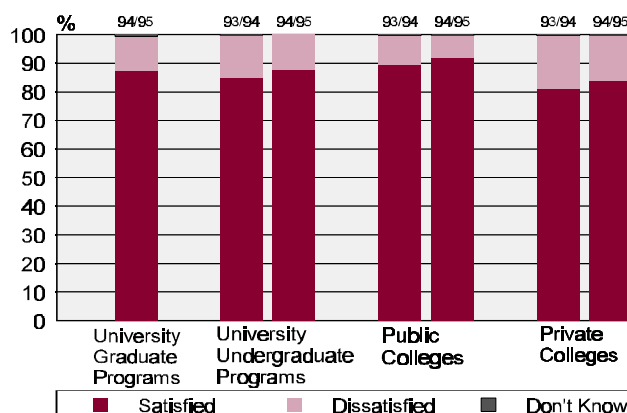


the same institution. Graduates of public colleges had a different experience: 66% in 1993/94 and 70% in 1994/95 would choose the same program and college again. Satisfaction levels of Memorial University undergraduates were lower than those of public college graduates but higher than private college graduates.

Considering those who would not repeat their experience, the institution rather than the program was the reason most graduates of the private colleges were dissatisfied with their choice. This contrasts with the view of those completing graduate and undergraduate programs at Memorial and graduates of public colleges, who in the majority of cases, indicated that it was the program rather than the institution which did not meet their expectations. In 1994/95, 19% of the graduates of private colleges said that if they had their time back they would do a different program in a different institution, compared to 9% of university undergraduates, 8% of public college graduates, and 4% of graduate program students.

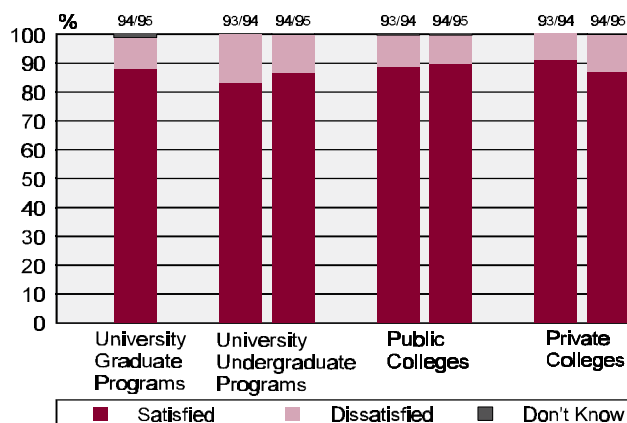
It should be noted that more 1995 private college graduates were satisfied with their choice of program and institution than graduates of 1994. Graduates of 1996 are currently being surveyed. Data from this survey will reveal whether this improvement is a trend. Few respondents stated they would not do a postsecondary program at all if they had their time back.

Figure 5.2.1: Graduate Satisfaction with the Overall Quality of the Program they Completed, 1993/94 and 1994/95



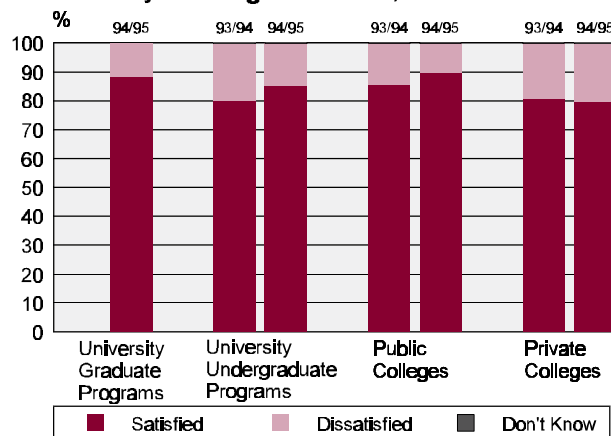
Notes: 1. n = 4,976 in 93/94, n = 4,350 in 94/95.

Figure 5.2.2: Graduate Satisfaction with the Overall Quality of the Teaching/Instruction, 1993/94 and 1994/95



Notes: 1. n = 4,979 in 93/94, n = 4,350 in 94/95.

Figure 5.2.3: Graduate Satisfaction with the Content of the Material Covered by the Program/Course, 1993/94 and 1994/95



Source: Department of Education Postsecondary Graduate Follow-up Survey (93/94 graduates and 94/95 graduates)

Notes: 1. n = 4,972 in 93/94, n = 4,347 in 94/95.

2. Data for university graduate programs unavailable for 1993/94.

5.2 To what extent are graduates satisfied with the quality of their programs?

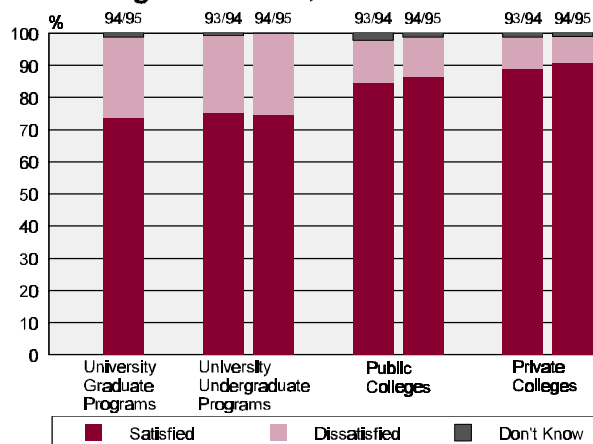
How satisfied graduates are with the quality of the program they recently completed is one indicator of the strength of a program, although it might be expected that views will change over time as graduates gain the workplace experience which can sharpen the criteria needed to judge program worth.

Satisfaction with the overall quality of the program was high for all groups in both the 1993/94 and 1994/95 follow-up surveys, with the percentage of graduates stating they were satisfied being higher in the later survey (Figure 5.2.1). A higher percentage of graduates of public colleges (92% in 1994/95, 89% in 1993/94) were satisfied with the overall quality of the program than graduates of Memorial (88%, 85%). The lowest percentage of graduates who were satisfied had attended private colleges but the number was still high (84%, 81%).

For each type of postsecondary institution, more students were satisfied with the quality of teaching than with course content (Figures 5.2.1 and 5.2.3). For private colleges, a higher number of graduates in 1993/94 (91%) were satisfied with the quality of teaching than in 1994/95 (87%). In the later survey higher numbers of graduates of public colleges (90%) were satisfied with the quality of teaching than graduates of graduate programs at Memorial (88%) or graduates of Memorial University undergraduate programs or private colleges (87% for each).

The number of graduates who were satisfied with course content

Figure 5.3.1: Graduate Satisfaction with Opportunities to Access Program/Courses, 1993/94 and 1994/95



Source: Department of Education Postsecondary Graduate Follow-up Survey (93/94 graduates and 94/95 graduates)

Notes: 1. n = 4,946 in 93/94, n = 4,341 in 94/95.

2. Data for university graduate programs unavailable for 1993/94.

increased between the two surveys for graduates of Memorial and public colleges, and decreased slightly, from 81% to 79%, for graduates of private colleges. In the 1994/95 survey the difference between the number satisfied with course content in public colleges (90%) and private colleges (80%) was substantial.

5.3 How satisfied are graduates with opportunities to access programs?

Responses to the postsecondary follow-up surveys indicate that accessibility to postsecondary programs is more of a problem for university students than for college students and, comparing the responses of public and private college graduates, more of a problem for public colleges than for private. Satisfaction with opportunities to enrol in postsecondary programs at the time desired was highest for private college graduates in both the 93/94

(89%) and 94/95 (91%) surveys (Figure 5.3.1). The fewest number of graduates satisfied with accessibility were those who had participated in graduate level programs at Memorial (74%).

In both surveys private college graduates were most satisfied with access to programs. The higher percentage of graduates who were satisfied with access to courses and programs suggests that private colleges are able to accommodate more students through more spaces, program offerings at more locations, or greater availability of more desirable programs.

5.4 How satisfied are graduates with the facilities and the level of technology available in postsecondary institutions?

A higher proportion of public and private college graduates than university graduates expressed satisfaction in the level of technology available at the

institutions they attended (Figure 5.4.1). Only two-thirds of the undergraduate university graduates indicated they were satisfied with the level of technology available to them at the university. The university had the highest percentage of graduates satisfied with instructional facilities, but the figures for public college graduates were nearly as high (Figure 5.4.2). Less than 70% of private college graduates were satisfied with instructional facilities.

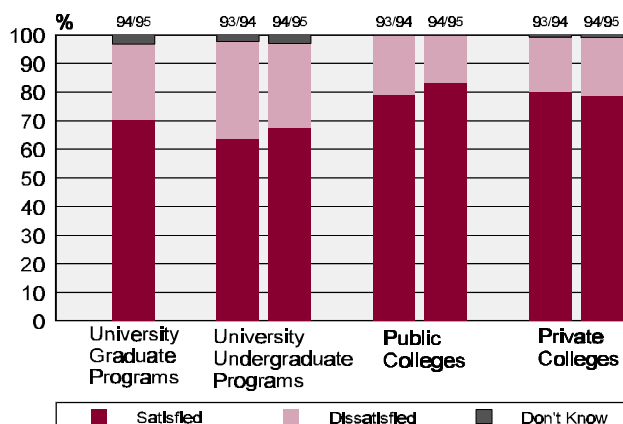
In addition, low numbers of private college graduates were satisfied with student facilities (Figure 5.4.3). Responses indicated that student facilities were also a concern for university graduate students. Twenty-three percent were dissatisfied, while another 13% responded "don't know", which suggests that many graduate students are unaware of what is available.

5.5 How satisfied are graduates with the knowledge and skills they gained from their education?

Graduate attitudes toward the skills and knowledge acquired from their programs (Figure 5.5.1) are comparable to their attitudes toward content of their courses and programs (Figure 5.2.3).

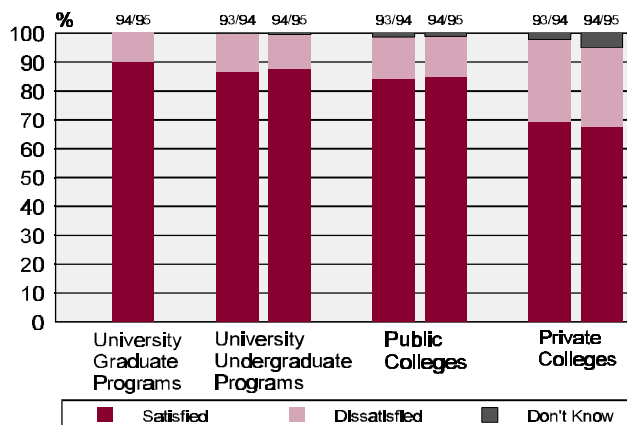
Memorial University graduate programs and public colleges produced the largest percentage of graduates who were satisfied with the skills and knowledge gained. Satisfaction was lowest for private colleges.

Figure 5.4.1: Graduate Satisfaction with the Level of Technology Available in Postsecondary Institutions, 1993/94 and 1994/95



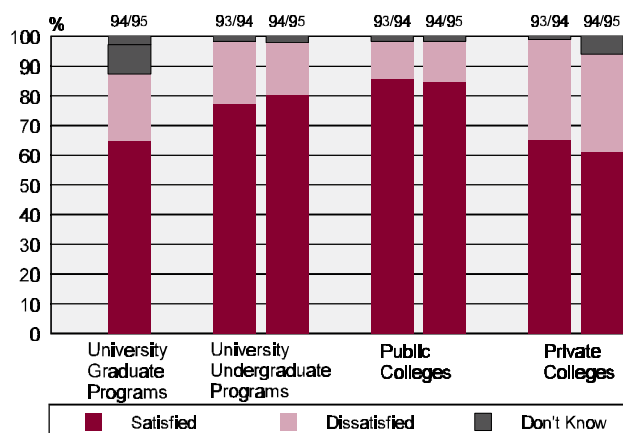
Notes: 1. n = 4,964 in 93/94, n = 4,348 in 94/95.

Figure 5.4.2: Graduate Satisfaction with Instructional Facilities, 1993/94 and 1994/95



Notes: 1. n = 4,954 in 93/94, n = 4,346 in 94/95.

Figure 5.4.3: Graduate Satisfaction with Student Facilities in the Educational Institution they Attended, 1993/94 and 1994/95

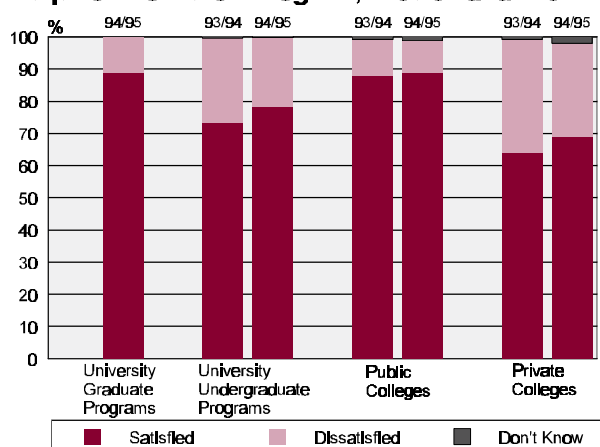


Source: Department of Education Postsecondary Graduate Follow-up Survey (93/94 graduates and 94/95 graduates)

Notes: 1. n = 4,960 in 93/94, n = 4,348 in 94/95.

2. Data for university graduate programs unavailable for 1993/94.

Figure 5.5.1: Graduate Satisfaction with the Skills and Knowledge Acquired from their Program, 1993/94 and 1994/95



Source: Department of Education Postsecondary Graduate Follow-up Survey (93/94 graduates and 94/95 graduates)

Notes: 1. n = 4,965 in 93/94, n = 4,350 in 94/95.
2. Data for university graduate programs unavailable for 1993/94.

5.6 How satisfied are graduates with program costs and financial assistance?

Postsecondary education is an expensive but increasingly necessary step toward securing employment and financial independence. Given the cost and the average family income in this province, this is an important accessibility issue. However, responses to the 1996 high school graduate follow-up survey show that 19% of those who did not enrol in a postsecondary program cited cost as the reason.

The highest percentage of graduates satisfied with the cost of their program were those of graduate programs at Memorial University and graduates of public colleges (Figure 5.6.1). Tuition in both cases is lower than undergraduate programs at Memorial or private college programs, and this is likely to be the reason for this response.

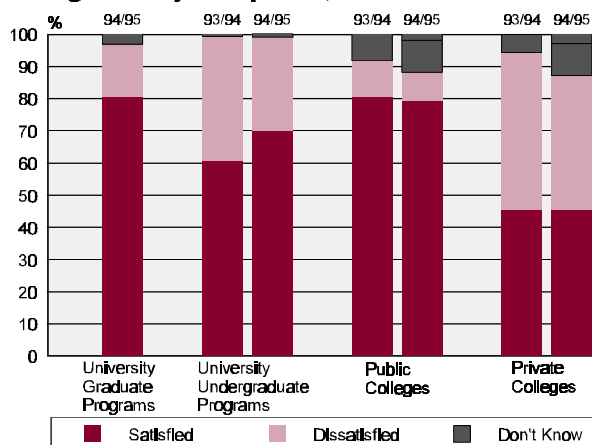
In the 1994/95 survey 70% of graduates from undergraduate programs were satisfied with the overall cost of their program, compared to 61% in 1993/94. The reason for this response is unclear, as tuition has been steadily increasing at Memorial, and the 1994/95 graduates would have

experienced higher tuition fees than the 1993/94 graduates. However, in 1994/95 there was a change in the student aid system which enabled students to borrow more money. This may have affected the graduates' attitudes toward the costs of their programs.

Relative to graduates from the public college and university sectors, significantly fewer private college graduates were satisfied with the cost of their program. It should be noted, however, that tuition costs at private colleges are not supported by public funds as they are in the public college and university sectors. The actual per pupil cost at public sector institutions is substantially higher than the tuition charged.

More private college graduates expressed satisfaction with the availability of financial assistance than graduates of other institutions. Only 25% of the graduates of graduate programs at Memorial were satisfied with the availability of

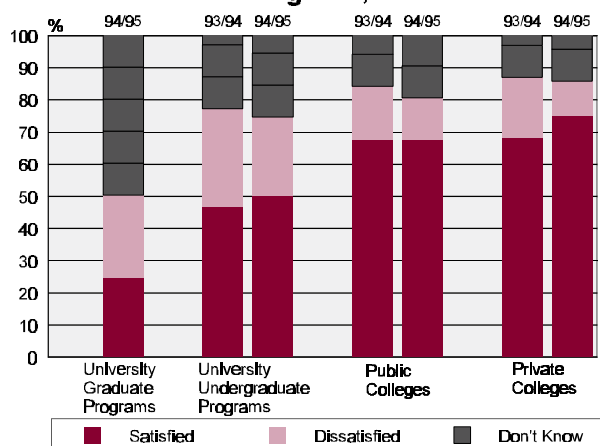
Figure 5.6.1: Graduate Satisfaction with the Overall Cost of the Program they Completed, 1993/94 and 1994/95



Source: Department of Education Postsecondary Graduate Follow-up Survey (93/94 graduates and 94/95 graduates)

Notes: 1. n = 4,872 in 93/94, n = 4,344 in 94/95.
2. Data for university graduate programs unavailable for 1993/94.

Figure 5.6.2: Graduate Satisfaction with the Availability of Financial Assistance Programs, 1993/94 and 1994/95



Source: Department of Education Postsecondary Graduate Follow-up Survey (93/94 graduates and 94/95 graduates)
 Notes: 1. n = 4,775 in 93/94, n = 4,297 in 94/95.
 2. Data for university graduate programs unavailable for 1993/94.

financial assistance programs and a large percentage (50%) indicated that they did not know what assistance was available. Fewer than half of the graduates of undergraduate programs at the university were satisfied with the availability of financial assistance.

Undergraduate university students were least likely to feel prepared for the job market - just over half said they were satisfied. Because undergraduate programs tend to be less vocational in nature than graduate programs or programs in the college systems this finding could be expected.

Actual employment experience, described in Chapter 4, differed somewhat from student opinion. More graduates from university undergraduate programs have higher earnings than college graduates (Figure 4.6.1) and the percentage of university graduates employed full-time is similar to the percentage of public college graduates and higher than the percentage of private college graduates (Figure 4.7.1).

Program content was frequently cited by university graduates as the reason their program did not prepare them for the job market (Figure 5.7.2). However, there were also a host of other reasons. In many cases graduates said their university programs were not practical enough. A number of university graduates also reported there was no market for their skills or they required more education.

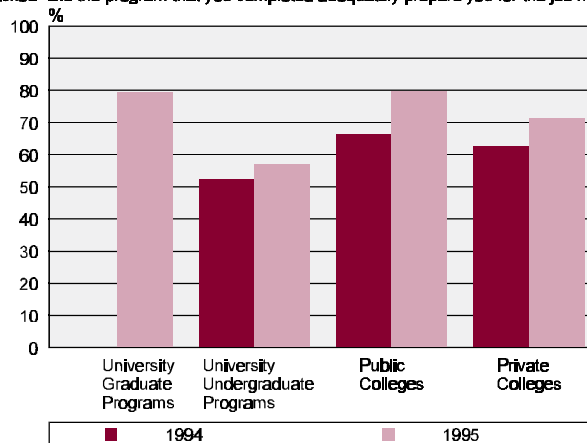
The length of the program was the most commonly perceived shortcoming of both private and

5.7 How satisfied are graduates with how well their education prepared them for the future?

Increasing numbers of postsecondary graduates feel that their education has adequately prepared them for the job market, but responses differ markedly when viewed by institution type. In the 1994/95 survey, nearly 80% of graduates of public colleges and graduate programs at Memorial felt their programs had made them employable (Figure 5.7.1). The responses from private college graduates were lower but did increase from 63% for 1993/94 graduates to 71% for those students graduating in 1994/95.

Figure 5.7.1: Proportion of Graduates who Felt Education Adequately Prepared them for the Job Market by Sector, 1993/94 and 1994/95

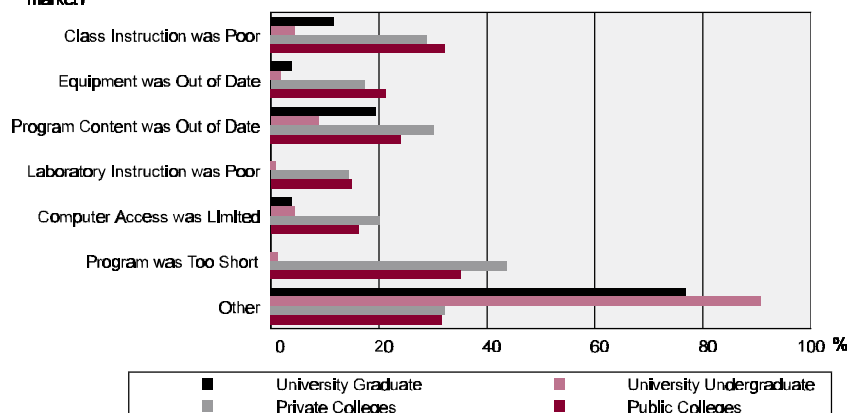
Graduates were asked "Did the program that you completed adequately prepare you for the job market?"



Notes: 1. n = 4,545 in 93/94, n = 4,348 in 94/95.
 2. Data for university graduate programs unavailable for 1993/94.

Figure 5.7.2: Graduate Perception of Reasons why Program did not Prepare them for the Job Market by Sector, 1995

Graduates who answered NO were asked to indicate why they felt that their program did not prepare them for the job market?



Notes: 1. n = 1,081.
2. Percentages may add to greater than 100 because respondents could check more than one reason.

public colleges, and this was more frequently cited by private college graduates. In addition, poor class instruction appears to be a significant issue for public and private graduates. Compared to university graduates, substantially higher percentages of both private and public college graduates noted problems in the other areas queried

as well - out of date equipment, poor laboratory instruction, and computer access.

Figure 5.7.3 illustrates responses concerning the extent to which programs provided an improved chance of a good income. Graduates from public colleges and graduate programs at Memorial

were more positive about prospects for a good income than graduates of private colleges or university undergraduate programs. However, differences among graduates from different postsecondary sectors were marginal. Graduates from all sectors were more positive in 1994/95 than graduates of the previous year. More than 70% were satisfied with the earnings opportunities provided by their program.

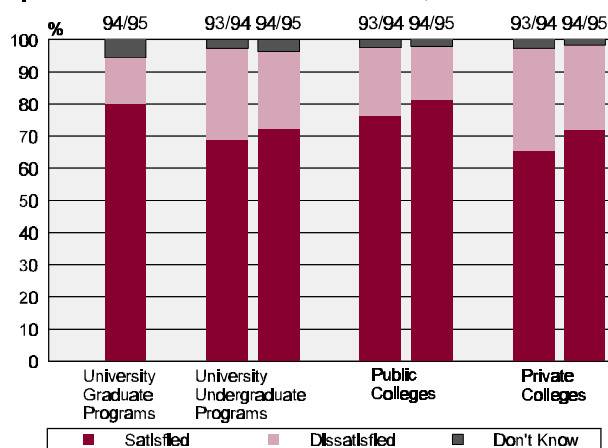
5.8 What does the public view as the purpose of postsecondary education?

In a public opinion poll on postsecondary education conducted by the Department of Education in 1995, respondents were asked to name the most important purpose of university and of college/trades education. The most important purpose of both university and college education was seen to be obtaining skills to pursue a career, cited by 35% of respondents for college education and 33% for university (Figure 3.8.1).

The lowest responses were for "developing general employability skills such as teamwork skills and communication skills". It is quite possible that other respondents assumed that such skills would be encompassed by "providing students with the knowledge and skills they need to pursue their chosen career", the most frequently chosen option.

Looking at the responses as a whole, preparing young people to succeed in the workplace was seen as the most important work of the university (83%) and colleges (85%). Many of these respondents may feel that a broad general education is

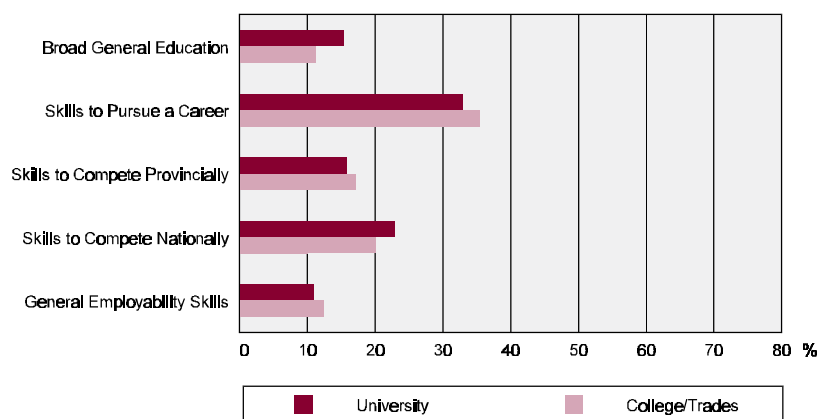
Figure 5.7.3: Graduate Satisfaction with the Extent to which the Program Provided an Improved Chance of a Good Income, 1993/94 and 1994/95



Source: Department of Education Postsecondary Graduate Follow-up Survey (93/94 graduates and 94/95 graduates)

Notes: 1. n = 4,972 in 93/94, n = 4,342 in 94/95.
2. Data for university graduate programs unavailable for 1993/94.

Figure 5.8.1: Public's Perception of the Most Important Purpose of Postsecondary Education, 1995



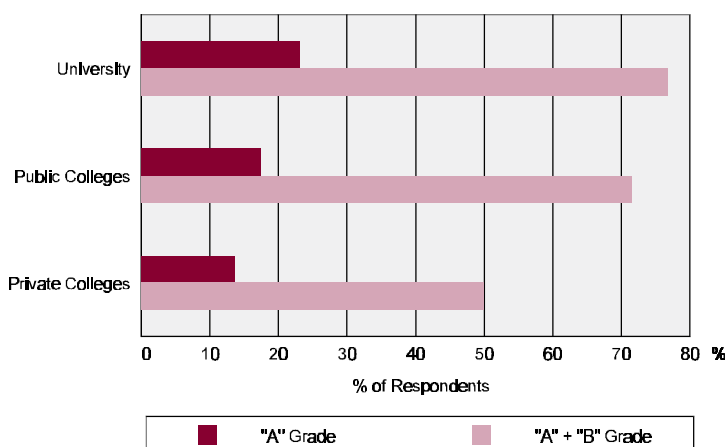
Source: Department of Education Public Opinion Poll, 1995, n = 851

important as well, but being able to find work is perceived to be essential. Considering the high proportion of the provincial budget which is spent on education, and our Province's experience of high unemployment, it might be expected that this view would be commonly held.

5.9 How satisfied are the public with postsecondary institutions?

Members of the general public give a high rating to the postsecondary system in this province, although less than one-quarter indicated they thought the system was first-rate (Figure 5.9.1). Over three-quarters

Figure 5.9.1: Percentage of the Public Awarding Postsecondary Institutions a Grade of either "A" or "B", Newfoundland, 1995



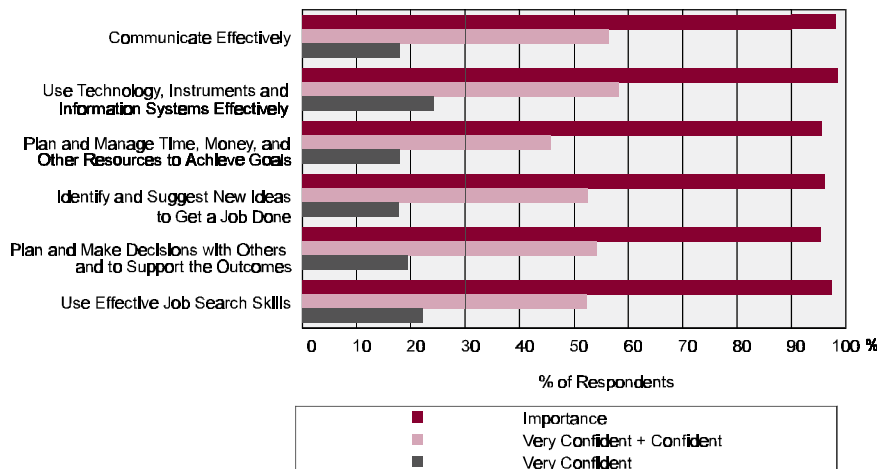
Source: Department of Education Public Opinion Poll, 1995, n = 851

of those polled gave the university a grade of "A" or "B". Public colleges were also rated highly - 72% would give them an "A" or "B". Private colleges did not receive the same level of public confidence: only half the population gave the private institutions a high rating. It is likely, however, that because most private colleges have not been operating for a long time, fewer of those polled would have any knowledge of the range or nature of their programs. There has been greater opportunity for the general public to have had some experience with public colleges directly, or indirectly through knowledge of college graduates.

5.10 How satisfied are the public that institutions are adequately preparing postsecondary graduates?

Virtually all those who responded to the 1995 public opinion poll believed in emphasizing communication, technology, time and resource management, innovation, teamwork, and job search skills in postsecondary programs (Figure 5.10.1). However, only about half of the respondents felt confident that institutions adequately develop these skills in their students and very few (approximately 20%) were "very confident". Responses for each of the items were similar. Respondents were least confident (40%) with the ability of postsecondary institutions to provide students with planning and resource management skills and most confident (58%) with postsecondary institutions in developing skills in the effective use of "technology, instruments, and information systems".

Figure 5.10.1: Public's Perception of Importance of Employability Attributes and Satisfaction with Postsecondary Emphases, 1995



Source: Department of Education Public Opinion Poll, 1995, n = 851

While the general public has relatively low confidence levels in how postsecondary institutions are preparing students for the job market, graduates themselves have a more positive view, at least in responding to a general question about being prepared for employment. As discussed in Section 5.7.1, approximately 80% of graduates of university graduate programs and public colleges felt they were prepared for the job market. Responses were lower for private colleges (71%) and university undergraduate programs (57%).

5.11 How does the public view the cost of postsecondary education?

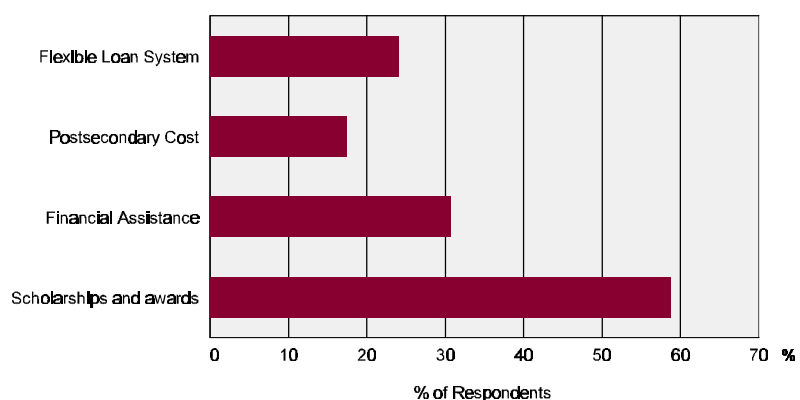
In recent years the cost of postsecondary education has become an issue for public concern. Grants to institutions have decreased, transfer payments from the federal government for postsecondary education have decreased, tuition fees have

increased markedly, and many new private colleges with relatively high tuition fees have opened. At the same time the student loan program has changed, so that students who at one time would have financial assistance from grants must now borrow the full amount to cover their expenses. All

of these changes have occurred while many parents, particularly those in rural areas, are experiencing financial stress because of the closure of the groundfish fishery. While there has not yet been a significant decrease in postsecondary enrolment in the face of these changes, the effects are being seen in the increased debt load of students (see Chapter 8).

Although it might not be expected that members of the general public would be aware of specific aspects of postsecondary funding, responses suggested that most feel that there are problems associated with the cost of advanced education (Figure 5.11.1). Few respondents reported being satisfied with the cost of postsecondary education (17.4%), the flexibility of the loan system (24%), or the financial assistance available to students (30.7%). The only area where a majority of respondents expressed satisfaction was "scholarships and awards". Regardless of the level of

Figure 5.11.1: Satisfaction with Different Aspects of Postsecondary Funding, 1995



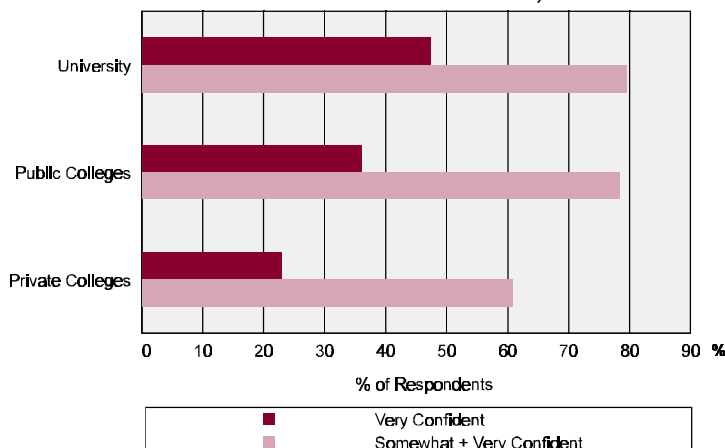
Source: Department of Education, n = 851.

public satisfaction, it must be noted that these are available to a very small percentage of postsecondary students. Further, a recent Department of Education study found that availability of scholarships was a major attraction for students to attend university outside the Province.

5.12 Does the public consider Newfoundland postsecondary institutions to be at a national standard?

Most members of the general public feel that our postsecondary institutions are as good as those in other provinces (Figure 5.12.1), but fewer people feel this is the case for private colleges (61%) than for the university (80%) or public colleges (78%). The university received the strongest endorsement by those individuals polled. Almost 50% were "very confident" that the Province's university was on a par with universities across the Country.

Figure 5.12.1: Public's Confidence that Newfoundland Postsecondary Institutions are as Good as Comparable Institutions in other Provinces, 1995



Source: Department of Education Public Opinion Poll, 1995, n = 851

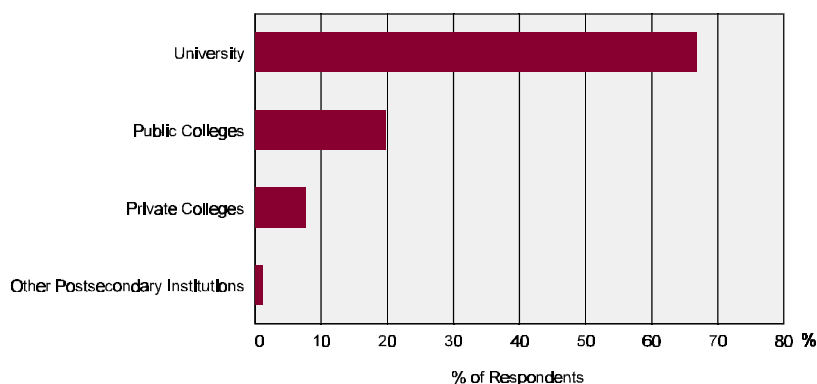
5.13 What is the public's first choice of postsecondary schooling?

The general public strongly favours university as a first choice of postsecondary institution. Over two thirds chose the university when asked the question, "If you could choose any postsecondary

institution for you or your children, what type of postsecondary institution would be your first choice?" (Figure 5.13.1). Only twenty percent chose public colleges and 8% felt private colleges would be the best choice.

The public's view is congruent with choices actually made by high school graduates. The 1997 Department of Education survey of 1996 high school graduates showed that many more graduates enrolled at the university (37%) than enrolled at public colleges (12%) or private colleges (13%).

Figure 5.13.1: Public's First Choice of Postsecondary Institution, 1995



Source: Department of Education Public Opinion Poll, 1995, n = 851