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## Survey Tracks College Degrees and Employment Rates

By Carina Zaragoza

The U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) released findings from a survey conducted over a 10-year period. The survey, titled *Ten Years After College: Comparing the Employment Experiences of 1992-93 Bachelor's Degree Recipients with Academic and Career-Oriented Majors*, followed approximately 9,000 bachelor's degree recipients and their subsequent employment rates. The entire report is publicly available in PDF format.

The report looks at the work experiences of these 9,000 graduates, along with their employment stability, industries, and salaries. A primary focus of the report is examining the differences in work experience among graduates with different types of degrees, namely academic degrees and career-oriented majors.

The report defines career-oriented majors as "those that prepare students for employment in a specific occupational area." Examples include business, health, and computer science. Academic majors are considered to be all other majors not geared towards specific careers, such as social sciences and humanities.

Of the 9,000 graduates included in this survey, 65% earned career-oriented degrees. Regardless, most of those surveyed were settled in jobs by 2003 and reported being satisfied with their pay and job security. Those who earned career-oriented degrees only earned slightly more than those who earned academic degrees, and the difference was almost negligible when other factors were taken into consideration.

All indications show that both types of degree earners are able to find employment at approximately the same rates, with the report finding 79.9% of academic degree earners employed in 2003 and 82% of career-oriented degree earners employed in 2003.

Debra Humphreys of the Association of American Colleges and Universities points out that the findings confirm that a degree does not necessarily make or break a career. Regardless of the degree types earned by graduates, "in a few years, there's not a big difference in job satisfaction," said Humphreys.

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One criticism of the study is that the data is outdated. While the survey did diligently track graduates over a 10-year period, the most recent findings are five years old. Humphreys notes that the business environment has changed since then and, again, degrees may not be as important as skills. The Association of American Colleges and Universities conducted a similar survey last year but instead focused on skills of graduates entering the workforce.

The National Center for Education Statistics was created by a congressional mandate requiring the U.S. Department of Education to “collect, collage, analyze, and report full and complete statistics on the condition of education in the United States.” The NCES is charged with the responsibility to provide reports and information on education statuses and trends in the U.S.

## On the Net

[Inside Higher Ed](#)

[NCES Survey](#)

[Association of American Colleges and Universities Survey](#)