



Achieving the Dream™



Measuring What Matters

Examining the Success of Achieving the Dream
Network College Graduates in Work and Life

2018 REPORT



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Alumni of Achieving the Dream Community Colleges Experience Success Beyond Completion

Associate degree attainment is increasing in the United States. In fact, over the past decade, the number of associate degrees awarded increased to over 1 million, *representing the largest increase of any degree level*.

However, more important than securing a degree is understanding how associate degree holders fare after college in key dimensions such as employment and well-being. Prospective students and parents want to know how institutions will prepare them for a knowledge-based economy and whether the significant investments they are making will have the long-term effects they desire. Similarly, policymakers, local and state legislators, donors, and employers want to understand how community colleges are providing both qualitative and quantitative returns to local communities and economies.

In 2016, with support from Strada Education Network, Achieving the Dream (ATD) sought to provide insight into the relationship between the college experience and whether community college graduates have *great jobs* and *great lives*. Specifically, we used the Gallup-USA Funds Associate Degree Graduates study to understand how associate degree holders at 15 ATD colleges in five states compare with Gallup's national sample of associate degree holders. The results of the study are in this report, *Measuring What Matters: Examining the Success of Achieving the Dream Network College Graduates in Work and Life*. They reveal important information about community college success in four areas: 1) economic return on investment (employment rates), 2) job satisfaction (including workplace engagement), 3) quality of life (well-being) and 4) collegiate experiences (including graduates' emotional attachment to their institution).

Compared with their national peers, ATD alumni are more likely to be:

- satisfied with their job and engaged at work
- thriving in nearly all elements of well-being: purpose, social, financial and community
- classified as having felt supported during college
- considered emotionally attached to their alma mater

In addition, the data show that black and Hispanic ATD graduates' perceptions of being prepared for life outside of college and their attachment levels are on par with or higher than those of white and Asian ATD graduates.

These results demonstrate the reach of the ATD model, which encourages community colleges to build a student-focused culture that values equity and engages internal and external stakeholders to advance a student success agenda. In addition to moving the needle on completion and closing achievement gaps for low-income students and students of color, ATD colleges are also improving the employment rate and well-being of their graduates.

Going forward, we seek to replicate these results by encouraging more of our 220-plus ATD colleges to track alumni outcomes by assessing their success beyond completion of their degree. Together, we can ensure that all community college students have great jobs and great lives!

Sincerely,

Dr. Karen A. Stout, President and CEO, Achieving the Dream

Executive Summary

Great Jobs: Workplace Engagement

- Achieving the Dream (ATD) graduates are on par with their national counterparts in terms of full-time employment by an employer, but they are more likely to be engaged at work. Forty-two percent of ATD graduates are engaged, versus 33% of associate degree holders nationally who are engaged.
 - Generally, ATD graduates are engaged at work regardless of their income status (42% of low-income ATD graduates are engaged vs. 43% of non-low-income ATD alumni), age (44% of younger students vs. 42% of adult learners) and first-generation status (43% of first-generation college students vs. 44% of non-first-generation college students).
- Of ATD graduates who are employed, 72% say they work in an area completely or somewhat related to their associate degree program.
- ATD graduates are more likely than associate degree holders nationally to strongly agree that they have an ideal job and interesting work. Over half of ATD graduates (52%) say that obtaining their associate degree was essential to achieving their career goals.

Great Lives: Well-Being

- Across nearly all well-being elements, ATD graduates are significantly more likely to be thriving than are their national counterparts — particularly in purpose and financial well-being.

Great Experiences: Collegiate Life

- Overall, 20% of ATD graduates are classified as having felt supported while attending their institution — slightly higher than the 16% of associate degree holders nationally.
 - In particular, ATD graduates are more likely than associate degree holders nationally to have perceived that professors or instructors cared about them (37% vs. 33%, respectively) and to have had at least one professor or instructor who made them excited about learning (67% vs. 63%).

Great Advocates: Alumni Attachment

- Overall, nearly three in 10 ATD graduates (29%), compared with fewer than one in five associate degree holders nationally (17%), are considered emotionally attached to their institution.
 - In particular, Hispanic ATD graduates (39%) are attached to their institution — higher than black ATD graduates (34%), Asian ATD graduates (31%) and white ATD graduates (25%).

- Nearly one-third of ATD graduates (31%) — significantly higher than associate degree holders nationally (22%) — strongly agree that their institution prepared them well for life outside of college.
 - Low-income students (33%) are more likely than non-low-income students (29%) to strongly agree their institution prepared them well for life outside of college. Similarly, adult learners (36%) are more likely than younger students (27%) to strongly agree with the same statement.
- Over half of ATD graduates (57%) — also higher than associate degree holders nationally (39%) — strongly agree their education was worth the cost.
 - ATD graduates, regardless of income or first-generation status, strongly agree their education was worth the cost.
- Black and Hispanic alumni are the most likely to strongly agree their education was worth the cost (61% and 62%, respectively) and to strongly agree they were prepared well for life outside of college (36% and 35%).
- Nearly nine in 10 ATD graduates (88%) rate their college experience as “good” or “excellent.”



Introduction

Community colleges are a vital part of the higher education landscape, serving over 40% of all undergraduate students in the U.S.¹ They provide access to postsecondary education, prepare students to transfer to four-year institutions, and offer workforce development and skills training. In the past 15 years, associate degree programs have gained a lot of traction. The number of associate degrees awarded increased by 72% between 2000-01 and 2014-15, from approximately 580,000 to over 1 million. In contrast, the number of bachelor's degrees rose by 58%, from 1.2 million to 1.9 million, during the same period.²

In particular, community colleges meet a need in higher education by offering flexible programs, an open admission policy and lower tuition compared with four-year institutions. These characteristics make community colleges a good choice for a variety of students, including first-generation college students (FGCS), those from lower-income households and adult learners.

In 2015, Gallup partnered with Strada Education Network (formerly USA Funds) to conduct a nationally representative study of associate degree holders, measuring the extent to which graduates have “great jobs” through successful and engaging careers and lead “great lives” by thriving in their overall well-being. One key finding from that study is that associate degree holders are as likely as bachelor's degree holders to strongly agree that their education was worth the cost.³

More recently, Gallup partnered with Achieving the Dream (ATD), a national nonprofit organization that is advancing student success, and the American Institutes for Research (AIR), one of the world's largest behavioral and social science research and evaluation organizations, to examine the community college experiences of ATD institutions with programmatic and policy initiatives to support student success. This study was designed to survey graduates of 15 ATD institutions in five states (Indiana, Texas, Florida, Virginia and Tennessee) that have a robust environment for policy implementation and a focus on scaling evidence-based practices,⁴ as well as readily available employment data. The institutions all joined the ATD network, which accepted its first cohort of colleges in 2004, to improve student outcomes.

Outcomes of Interest and Gallup Metrics

To increase accountability in higher education, several stakeholders, including families and policymakers, are asking institutions to demonstrate the value of a college degree beyond the traditional metrics — namely, graduation and job placement rates and alumni salaries. While these outcomes are important and easy to measure, they do not adequately reflect the missions of higher education institutions, and they fail to address the various goals of students, especially at community colleges. However, Gallup is uniquely positioned to help supplement these traditional metrics with other measures of long-term outcomes to provide a more holistic measure of graduates' lives outside of college. The results from this study reveal

1 Retrieved from <https://trends.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/trends-in-community-colleges-research-brief.pdf>

2 Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d16/tables/dt16_322.20.asp?current=yes and https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d16/tables/dt16_321.20.asp?current=yes

3 Retrieved from <http://www.stradaeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Gallup-USA-Funds-Associate-Degree-Graduates-Report.pdf>

4 Retrieved from <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/progressreportoncommunitycollege.pdf>

vital information about community college success in four critical areas: 1) economic return on investment (employment rates), 2) job satisfaction (including workplace engagement), 3) quality of life (well-being) and 4) collegiate experiences (including graduates' emotional attachment to their institution).

Great Jobs: Workplace Engagement

Job rates do not reflect whether graduates are intellectually and emotionally attached to their work, but employed graduates who are *engaged* at work are more likely to be more loyal and productive. Workplace engagement is more nuanced than simple job satisfaction. Engaged employees are intellectually and emotionally connected to their organization and work teams because they are able to do what they do best, they like what they do at work and they have someone at work who cares about their development. Gallup's expertise on employee engagement is rooted in more than 30 years of research on the workplace conditions that are most consistently related to employee and workgroup performance.

Great Lives: Well-Being

As higher education institutions struggle to align their efforts with effective accountability measures, increasing attention is being paid to the concept of student well-being as a central tenet of higher education. Gallup's research shows that well-being is predictive of academic success and engagement. When individuals focus on improving their well-being, they are more resilient and adaptable, manage stress better, engage in civic activities, and are more likely to agree they learn something new or interesting each day — a measure of lifelong learning.

Great Experiences: Collegiate Life

Gallup's research on U.S. college graduates and associate degree holders has consistently revealed six key undergraduate experiences that strongly relate to workplace engagement and well-being after graduation. These findings debunk the conventional belief that the *type* of institution that students attend is the most meaningful factor in determining whether graduates have fulfilling careers and lives. Rather, the results of Gallup's study of alumni outcomes suggest that *how* they experienced college is, in fact, more meaningful.

Great Advocates: Alumni Attachment

Gallup's global research on behalf of hundreds of organizations and institutions examines the populations they serve and graduates' emotional connections to those organizations — identifying which experiences drive their engagement, as well as the attributes of those who are engaged versus those who are not. Similarly, Gallup studies the emotional connections that alumni have to their alma mater, determining which experiences and attributes relate to a lasting sense of connection and commitment to their undergraduate college or university.

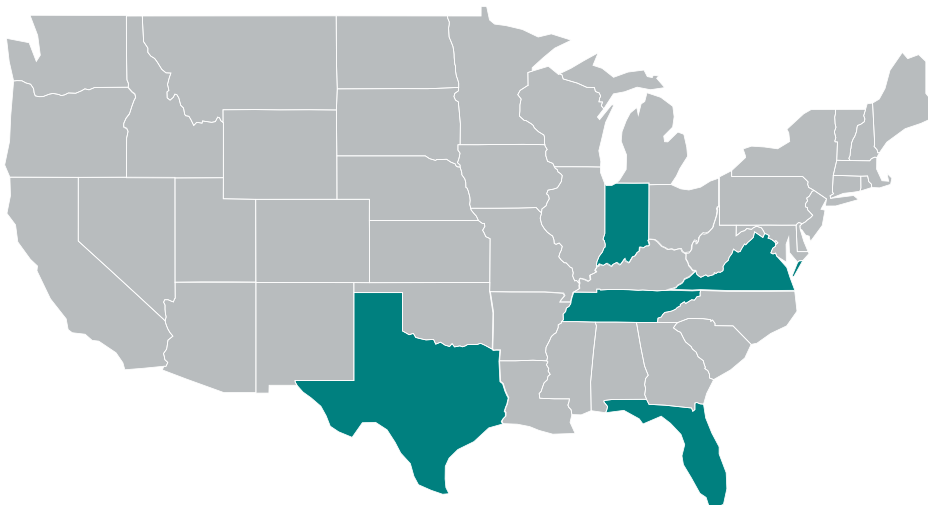
National Comparison Group and Subgroups of Interest

The results in this report are based on 5,702 respondents, ATD graduates who received their associate degree between 2000 and 2016 from among 15 institutions. These ATD graduates' highest completed level of education is an associate degree. The respondents have been aggregated to form the "ATD graduates" group.

The results are compared with data from 824 respondents in the Gallup-USA Funds Associate Degree Graduates study.⁵ This study's respondents obtained an associate degree between 2000 and 2015, and an associate degree is their highest completed level of education.

Some differences may exist between the national comparison points included in this report and national estimates that Gallup has previously released because this report focuses specifically on graduates who received their associate degree between 2000 and 2016.

Sample Sizes From 15 ATD Institutions



Indiana

Ivy Tech Community College (n=630)

Virginia

Danville Community College (n=103)

Northern Virginia Community College (n=1,285)

Patrick Henry Community College (n=77)

Tennessee

Chattanooga State Community College (n=329)

Jackson State Community College (n=220)

Southwest Tennessee Community College (n=245)

Florida

Broward College (n=455)

Pensacola State College (n=135)

Texas

Austin Community College (n=304)

El Centro College (n=402)

Grayson College (n=220)

Lee College (n=116)

Lone Star College (n=937)

North Lake College (n=244)

⁵ Differences between ATD's results and those in the Gallup-USA Funds database referenced in the body of the text are statistically significant.

Equity: Subgroups of Interest

ATD believes that higher education institutions have an obligation to work toward equity for their students, meaning that each student receives what they need to be successful through the intentional design of the college experience.⁶ To further assess differences in outcomes among different types of students, these subgroups of interest will be examined throughout the report:

- **First-generation college students (FGCS):** According to the Community College Research Center, 38% of community college students are FGCS.⁷ A growing body of literature shows that FGCS face greater challenges and obstacles in obtaining a degree than do students whose parents completed college. For example, research studies have found that FGCS often do not take advantage of the full range of opportunities available to them⁸ and are more likely to work part time or full time and only take classes part time.⁹ This can lead FGCS to reduce their course load or drop out. In the sample of ATD graduates, 65% are considered FGCS.
- **Younger students and adult learners:** Community colleges balance the different needs of younger students and adult learners. According to the American Association of Community Colleges, the average age of community college students is 28, while approximately half are younger than 21.¹⁰ For the purposes of this report, being an adult learner is defined as starting an associate degree program at the age of 25 or older. As stated by *Community College Review*, younger students “tend to see their educational experience as a pathway to adulthood, while older students, who may have children and are returning from former professional experiences, possess a different vantage point of maturity and focus.”¹¹ Many community colleges have turned their attention to serving adult learners through workforce retraining and other programs. Forty-nine percent of ATD graduates in this study are classified as adult learners.
- **Low-income and non-low-income students:** Having received need-based federal financial aid is used as a proxy for being considered a low-income student. Federal financial aid helps students pay for education expenses through grants (e.g., Pell Grant), loans and work-study opportunities.¹² According to the Community College Research Center, 44% of low-income students (those with an annual household income of less than \$25,000) attend community colleges. Among low-income students, approximately 14% complete their associate degree program within five years.¹³ Fifty-seven percent of ATD graduates indicated they received need-based federal financial aid and therefore are classified as low-income.

6 Retrieved from <http://achievingthedream.org/about-us>

7 Retrieved from <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/Community-College-FAQs.html>

8 Darling, R., & Smith, M. (2007). First-generation college students: First-year challenges. In M. Hunter, B. McCalla-Wriggins & E. White (Eds.), *Academic Advising: New Insights for Teaching and Learning in the First Year* (203-211). University of South Carolina: National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.

9 Joo, S.-H., Durband, D. B., & Grable, J. (2008). The academic impact of financial stress on college students. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory and Practice*, 10(3), 287-305.

10 Retrieved from <http://dev.aacc.nche.edu/ABOUTCC/Pages/fastfactsfactsheet.aspx>

11 Retrieved from <https://www.communitycollegereview.com/blog/changing-student-demographics-rising-number-of-professional-students>

12 Retrieved from https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/glossary#Federal_Student_Aid_Programs

13 Retrieved from <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/Community-College-FAQs.html>

- Racial/Ethnic subgroups:** Approximately half of students (51%) who attend community colleges are considered minorities, whereas 42% of students at four-year institutions are considered minorities.¹⁴ The six-year completion rate for students varies: 45% of white students and 44% of Asian students complete their associate degree program within six years and are significantly more likely to earn their degree than are Hispanic (34%) and black students (26%).¹⁵ In the sample of ATD graduates, 58% are white, 19% are black, 17% are Hispanic and 6% are Asian.

Subgroups of Interest

	ATD graduates	Associate degree holders nationally
First-generation college students	65%	68%
Adult learners	49%	46%
Low-income*	57%	60%
White	58%	71%
Black	19%	12%
Hispanic	17%	15%
Asian	6%	2%

*Low-income is defined as having received need-based federal financial aid while a student.

Additionally, ATD encourages institutions to use metrics that track successful completion and subsequent earnings of family-sustaining wages, which are important post-collegiate outcomes. Tracking economic gains realized from obtaining a certification is not always possible because students drop out or do not earn family-sustaining wages upon completion. To measure this, ATD graduates' results are disaggregated by their program of study to incorporate the median salary data provided by AIR.

¹⁴ Retrieved from <https://trends.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/trends-in-community-colleges-research-brief.pdf>

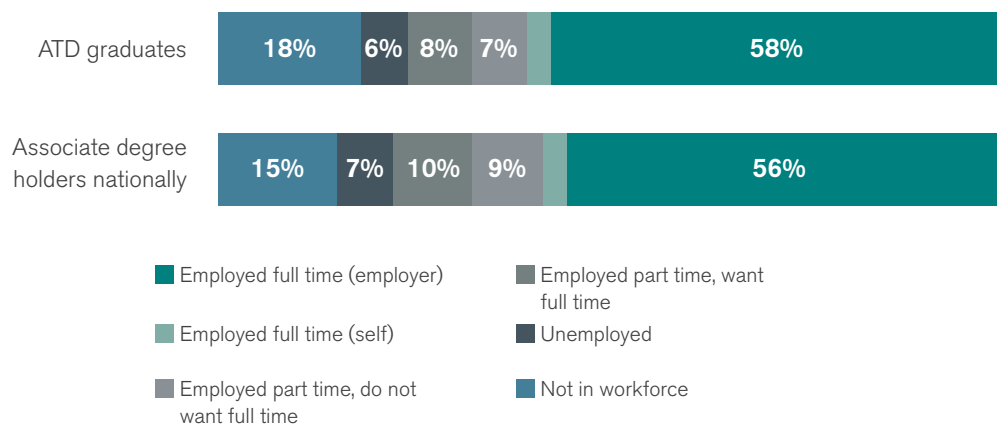
¹⁵ Retrieved from <https://nscresearchcenter.org/signaturereport12-supplement-2/>

Results

Great Jobs: Workplace Engagement

While students may have many reasons for wanting to earn their associate degree, a primary reason for attending community college is that they want to obtain or update job-related skills,¹⁶ indicating that employment is a strong motivator for many students. ATD graduates are as likely as their national counterparts to be employed full time by an employer (58% vs. 56%, respectively).

Employment Status of Graduates



A majority of employed ATD graduates work in an area or sector related to their associate degree program. Forty-four percent of ATD graduates say their current work is “completely related” to their degree program, and another 28% say it is “somewhat related.” When looking at programs of study, employed ATD graduates who obtained an associate degree in health professions are most likely to be working in a related job — 83% of these graduates now work in the healthcare field. Additionally, about half of employed ATD graduates who studied engineering (54%), computer and information services (51%), and education (47%) are employed in a field related to their program of study.

¹⁶ Retrieved from http://www.ccsse.org/survey/reports/2017/standard_reports/ccsse_2017_coh_freqs_allstu.pdf

Fields of Employment Among Employed ATD Graduates, by Academic Program

Area of Employment	Associate Degree Program						
	Health professions	Education	Engineering [^]	Computer and information services	Law enforcement ^{^^}	Business	Liberal arts and general studies ^{^^^}
Healthcare	83%	6%	3%	3%	10%	7%	13%
Education, training or library	3%	47%	2%	4%	3%	7%	11%
Science, engineering or architecture	1%	1%	30%	3%	1%	2%	2%
Manufacturing or construction	1%	3%	24%	4%	2%	9%	5%
Computer and information systems or mathematics	1%	3%	7%	51%	3%	6%	7%
Law or public policy	1%	2%	1%	1%	35%	3%	4%
Finance, insurance or real estate	2%	5%	2%	5%	2%	18%	6%
Community or social services	1%	4%	1%	1%	4%	2%	4%
Arts, design, entertainment, sports or media	0%	1%	1%	2%	0%	3%	8%
Transportation	1%	1%	4%	4%	4%	5%	4%
Retail	2%	7%	5%	8%	6%	10%	12%
Other	5%	21%	19%	13%	32%	28%	23%

Note: Highlights denote similar fields of employment and programs of study. Due to rounding, percentages may total 100% +/-2%.

[^] *Engineering* includes engineering technologies, engineering-related fields, and mechanic and repair technicians.

^{^^} *Law enforcement* includes homeland security and firefighting.

^{^^^} *Liberal arts and general studies* includes humanities, multi/interdisciplinary studies, and visual and performing arts.

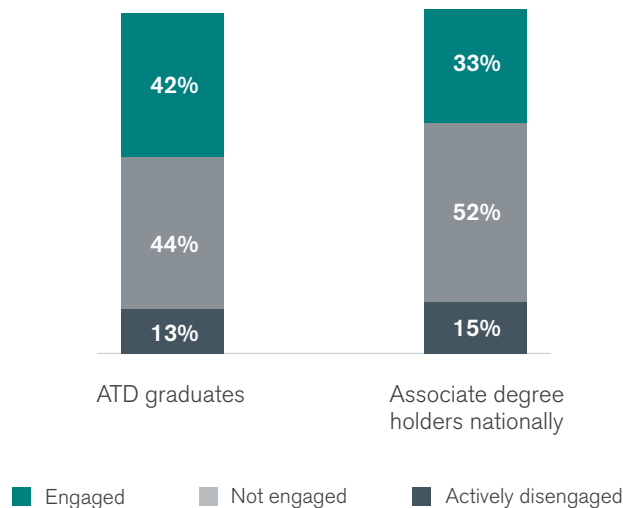
Workplace Engagement

Gallup's workplace engagement research shows that businesses or work units scoring in the top half of their organization in Gallup's employee engagement database have nearly double the odds of success based on a composite of financial, customer retention, safety, quality, shrinkage and absenteeism metrics, compared with those in the bottom half of employee engagement. Based on employees' responses to questions about various workplace elements, Gallup categorizes workers as "engaged," "not engaged" or "actively disengaged."

Engaged	Not Engaged	Actively Disengaged
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highly involved in and enthusiastic about their work and workplace. They are psychological "owners," drive performance and innovation, and move the organization forward. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Psychologically unattached to their work and company. Because their engagement needs are not being fully met, they put time — but not energy or passion — into their work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resentful that their needs are not being met and are acting out their unhappiness. Every day, these workers potentially undermine what their engaged coworkers accomplish.

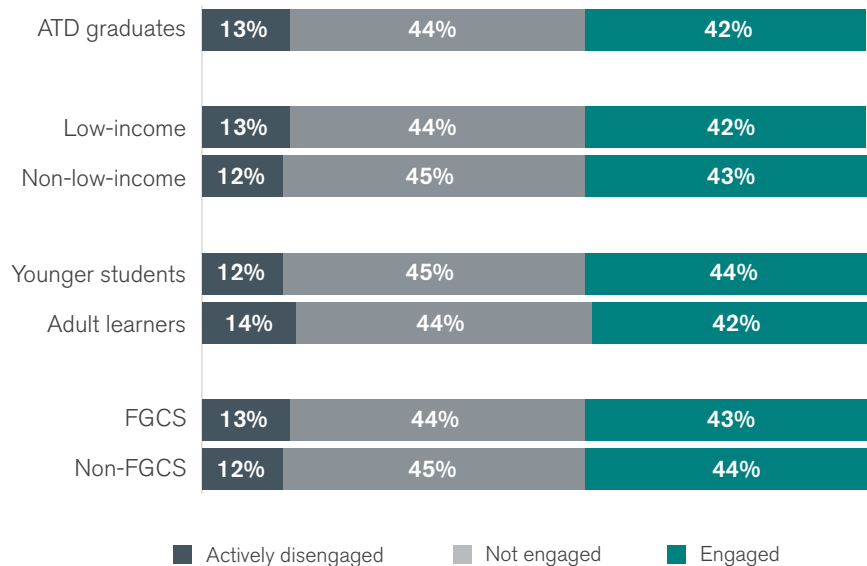
ATD graduates are as likely as their national counterparts to be employed full time by an employer, and they are more likely to be engaged at work. Forty-two percent of ATD graduates are engaged, versus 33% of associate degree holders nationally who are engaged.

Workplace Engagement



Generally, ATD graduates are engaged at work regardless of their income status (42% of low-income ATD graduates are engaged vs. 43% of non-low-income ATD alumni), age (44% of younger students vs. 42% of adult learners) and first-generation status (43% of FGCS vs. 44% of non-FGCS).

Engagement of ATD Alumni

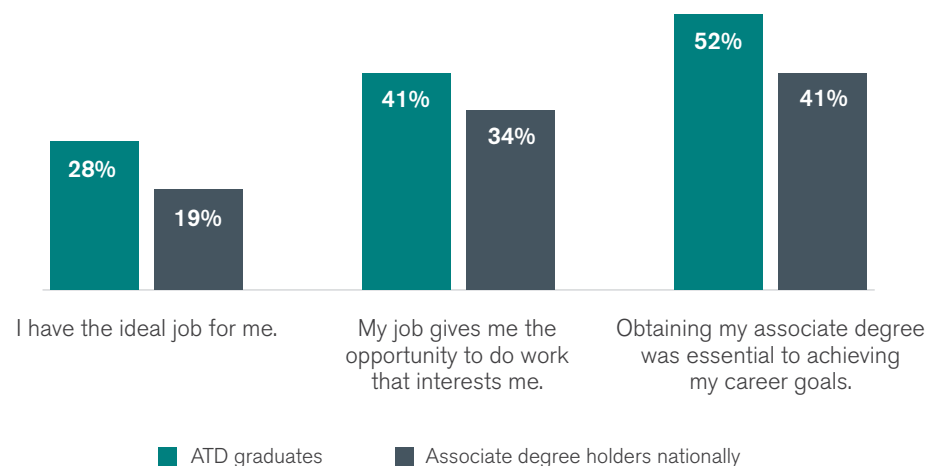


Note: Due to rounding, percentages may total 100% +/-1%.

ATD Graduates More Likely Than National Counterparts to Be Satisfied With Their Job; Majority Attribute Success to Their Associate Degree

ATD graduates are more likely than associate degree holders nationally to strongly agree that they have the ideal job for them (28% vs. 19%, respectively) and that their job gives them the opportunity to do work that interests them (41% vs. 34%). In terms of whether obtaining their associate degree was essential to achieving their career goals, ATD graduates (52%) are more likely than associate degree holders nationally (41%) to strongly agree.

Career Satisfaction (Strongly agree)



Employed ATD graduates who were in a health professions degree program (72%), education program (56%) or engineering program (51%) are the most likely to strongly agree that their degree was essential to achieving their career goals.

**Obtaining my associate degree was essential to achieving my career goals.
(Strongly agree)**

	% Strongly agree
Health professions	72%
Education	56%
Business	49%
Engineering[^]	51%
Law enforcement^{^^}	44%
Liberal arts and general studies^{^^^}	42%
Computer and information services	40%

Note: Results are among employed ATD graduates.

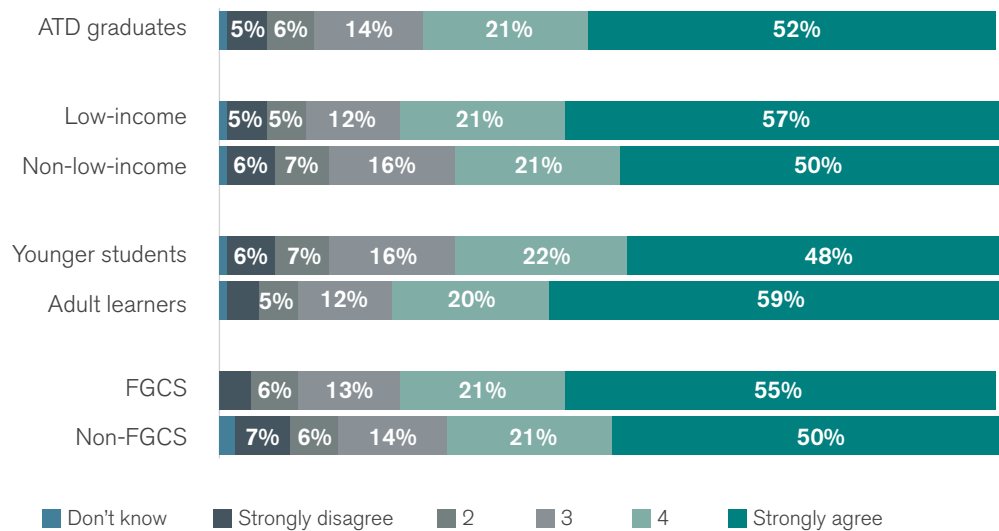
[^] *Engineering* includes engineering technologies, engineering-related fields, and mechanic and repair technicians.

^{^^} *Law enforcement* includes homeland security and firefighting.

^{^^^} *Liberal arts and general studies* includes humanities, multi/interdisciplinary studies, and visual and performing arts.

Generally, low-income alumni (57% vs. 50% of non-low-income alumni), adult learners (59% vs. 48% of younger students) and FGCS (55% vs. 50% of non-FGCS) are more likely to strongly agree that obtaining their associate degree was essential to achieving their career goals.

**Obtaining my associate degree was essential to achieving my career goals.
(Among ATD graduates)**



Note: Percentages of less than 5% are not shown. Due to rounding, percentages may total 100% +/-1%.

Great Lives: Well-Being

Gallup and Sharecare (formerly Healthways) developed the Gallup-Sharecare Well-Being 5 View to measure the important aspects of a life well-lived. The index, which is based on decades of Gallup and Sharecare global research, includes 10 items that measure well-being in five interrelated elements:

- **Purpose well-being:** Liking what you do each day and being motivated to achieve your goals
- **Social well-being:** Having strong and supportive relationships and love in your life
- **Financial well-being:** Managing your economic life to reduce stress and increase security
- **Community well-being:** Liking where you live, feeling safe and having pride in your community
- **Physical well-being:** Having good health and enough energy to get things done daily

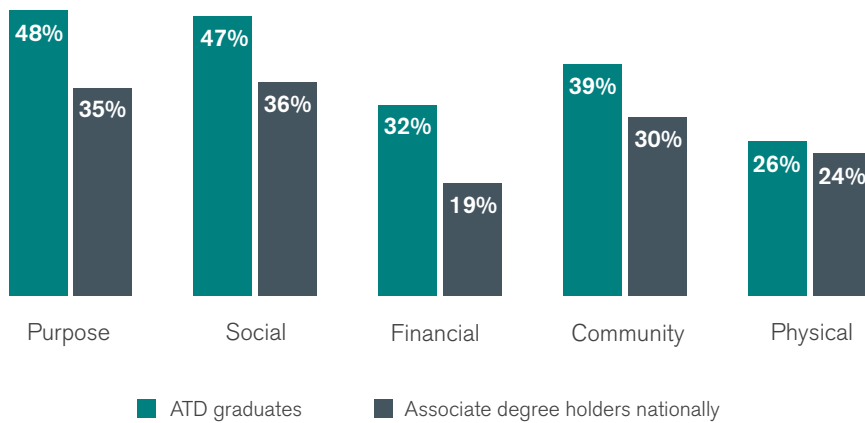
To enable institutions to identify levels of well-being and create impact, Gallup categorizes people's well-being in each element as one of the following:

- **Thriving:** Well-being that is *strong and consistent* in a particular element
- **Struggling:** Well-being that is *moderate* in a particular element
- **Suffering:** Well-being that is *low and inconsistent* in a particular element

Across Nearly All Well-Being Elements, ATD Graduates Significantly More Likely Than National Counterparts to Be Thriving

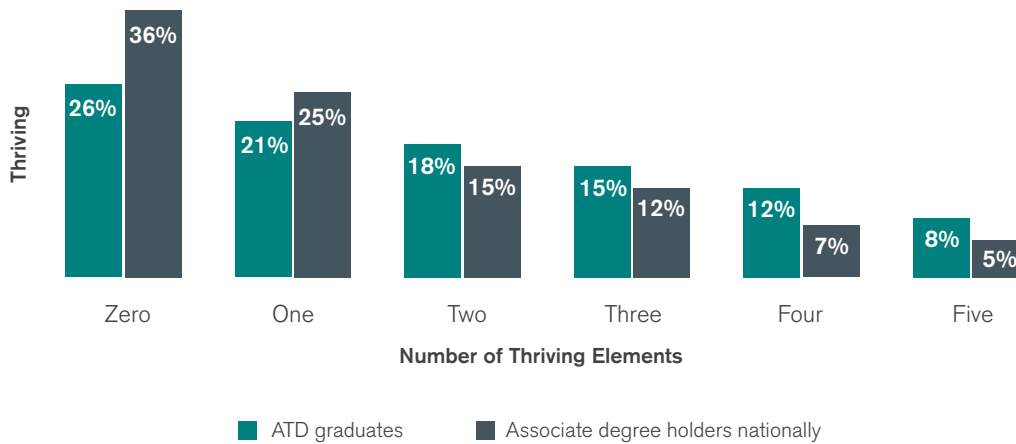
Large differences in “percentage thriving” between ATD graduates and associate degree holders nationally include a 13-percentage-point gap in purpose well-being (48% vs. 35%, respectively) and a 13-point gap in financial well-being (32% vs. 19%). The smallest gap — two points — exists in physical well-being, where 26% of ATD graduates are considered thriving, compared with 24% of associate degree holders nationally.

Graduates Thriving in Each Element of Well-Being



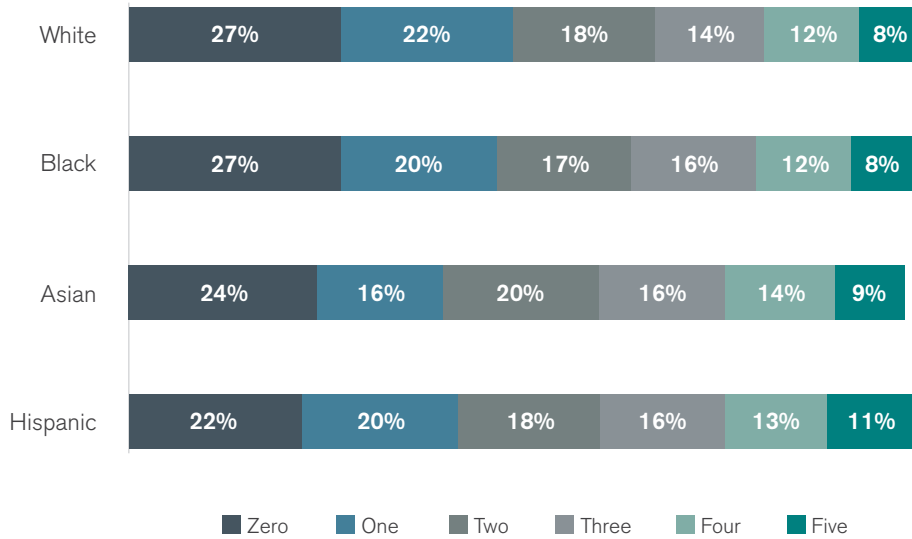
The pinnacle of well-being is to be thriving in all five elements. Eight percent of ATD graduates and 5% of their national counterparts are thriving in five elements. On the other end of the spectrum, 26% of ATD graduates — 10 points lower than associate degree holders nationally (36%) — are thriving in zero elements of well-being.

ATD Graduates More Likely Than Their National Counterparts to Be Thriving



Among ATD graduates, FGCS and non-FGCS have similar well-being outcomes — 21% of both groups are thriving in at least four well-being elements. Among racial/ethnic subgroups, Hispanic and Asian alumni are most likely to be thriving in at least four elements of well-being (24% and 23%, respectively), followed by black (20%) and white alumni (20%).

Number of Thriving Elements, by Race/Ethnicity (Among ATD graduates)



Great Experiences: Collegiate Life

In its 2016 study of associate degree holders nationally,¹⁷ Gallup identified six critical college experiences that are strongly associated with well-being and engagement at work. Three of the six relate to graduates feeling supported in college, and the other three tie to experiential learning.

Gallup classifies graduates as having **felt supported** in college if they strongly agree they had these experiences:

- a professor who cared about them as a person
- at least one professor who made them excited about learning
- a mentor who encouraged them to pursue their goals and dreams

Gallup examines these three key college experiences related to **experiential learning** by asking if graduates:

- had a job or internship that allowed them to apply what they were learning in the classroom
- worked on a project that took a semester or more to complete
- were extremely active in extracurricular activities and organizations

These measures can provide institutional leaders with insights into the experiences and programs that are most closely associated with success among their graduates. Comparisons with national graduates can yield further insights into areas of strength and opportunities for growth.

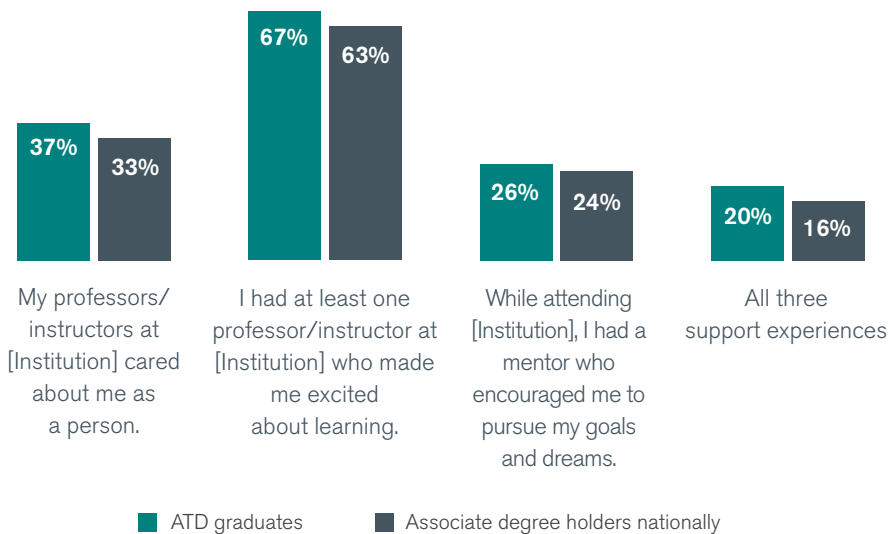
¹⁷ Retrieved from <http://www.stradaeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Gallup-USA-Funds-Associate-Degree-Graduates-Report.pdf>

ATD Graduates More Likely Than National Counterparts to Have Felt Supported

By building confidence, students tend to be more motivated in their academic behaviors and pursuits¹⁸ and ultimately their intent to persist in their program.¹⁹ Student confidence and persistence are linked with several experiences — in particular, students' interactions with supportive faculty and mentors. Meaningful social interactions, including informal advising, help students feel they belong in higher education and provide them with access to information and resources they can use to be successful in school and after graduation.²⁰

Overall, 20% of ATD graduates are classified as having felt supported while attending their institution — slightly higher than the 16% of associate degree holders nationally. In particular, ATD graduates are more likely than associate degree holders nationally to have had professors or instructors who cared about them (37% vs. 33%, respectively) and to have had at least one professor or instructor who made them excited about learning (67% vs. 63%). ATD graduates are on par with associate degree holders nationally in terms of having had a mentor who encouraged them to pursue their goals and dreams (26% vs. 24%).

Support Experiences (Strongly agree)



Adult learners (22% vs. 18% of younger students) and low-income students (21% vs. 18% of non-low-income students) are more likely to be classified as having felt supported at their ATD institution (i.e., strongly agreeing with all three support experiences). FGCS and non-FGCS at ATD institutions are similar in their classifications of having felt supported (both 20%).

18 Retrieved from <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/shifts-in-confidence.html>

19 Retrieved from <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/faculty-validation-persistence.html>

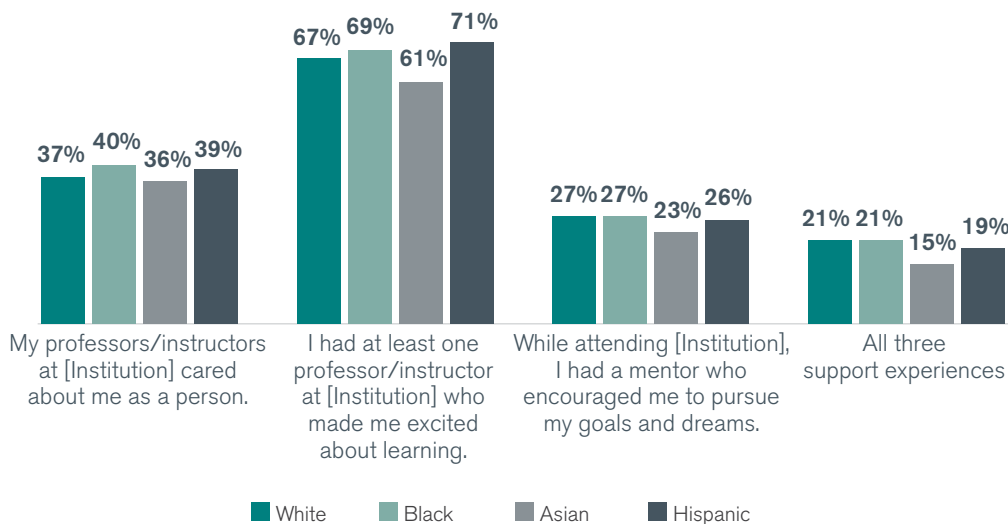
20 Retrieved from <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/non-academic-student-support-mechanisms.html>

Support Experiences Among ATD Subgroups, by Income, Age and First-Generation Status (Strongly agree)

Support Experiences	Income		Age		First-Generation Status	
	Low-income	Non-low-income	Younger students	Adult learners	FGCS	Non-FGCS
My professors/instructors at [Institution] cared about me as a person.	41%	34%	35%	41%	38%	38%
I had at least one professor/instructor at [Institution] who made me excited about learning.	70%	64%	67%	69%	68%	68%
While attending [Institution], I had a mentor who encouraged me to pursue my goals and dreams.	28%	24%	24%	27%	26%	27%
All three support experiences	21%	18%	18%	22%	20%	20%

Generally, Hispanic students (19%) have a similar percentage as black (21%) and white students (21%) in terms of having had all three support experiences. The Asian percentage comes in at 15%.

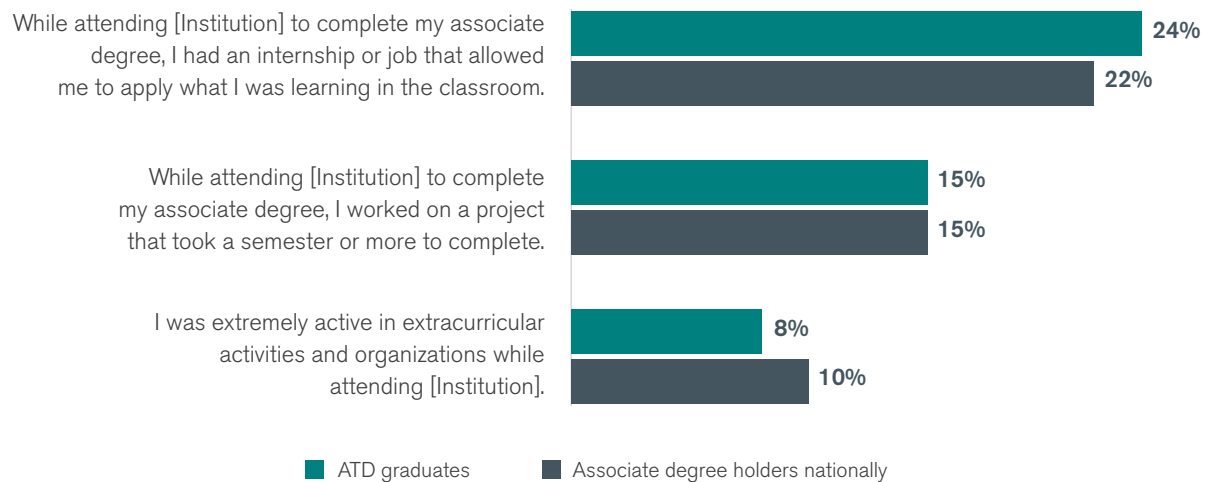
Support Experiences, by Race/Ethnicity (Strongly agree, among ATD graduates)



ATD Graduates Similar to National Counterparts on Having Had Experiential Learning Opportunities

For employers and hiring managers, experiential learning opportunities are becoming increasingly popular indicators of graduates' knowledge and skills. In fact, the Association of American Colleges and Universities reported that nearly four in five employers want colleges to place more emphasis on internships or community-based field projects that teach students to apply knowledge and skills in real-world settings.²¹ Overall, ATD graduates generally mirror associate degree holders nationally on each of the three key experiential learning opportunities.

Experiential Learning Opportunities (Strongly agree)



Alumni are as likely to have had each of the three key experiential learning opportunities regardless of income or first-generation status. Adult learners are more likely than younger students to strongly agree that they had an internship or job that allowed them to apply what they were learning in the classroom (28% vs. 20%, respectively) and that they worked on a project that took a semester or more to complete (17% vs. 13%).

21 Retrieved from https://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/LEAP/2009_EmployerSurvey.pdf

Experiential Learning Opportunities Among ATD Subgroups, by Income, Age and First-Generation Status (Strongly agree)

Experiential Learning Opportunities	Income		Age		First-Generation Status	
	Low-income	Non-low-income	Younger students	Adult learners	FGCS	Non-FGCS
While attending [Institution] to complete my associate degree, I had an internship or job that allowed me to apply what I was learning in the classroom.	25%	25%	20%	28%	26%	24%
While attending [Institution] to complete my associate degree, I worked on a project that took a semester or more to complete.	16%	15%	13%	17%	15%	16%
I was extremely active in extracurricular activities and organizations while attending [Institution].	8%	7%	8%	8%	8%	7%

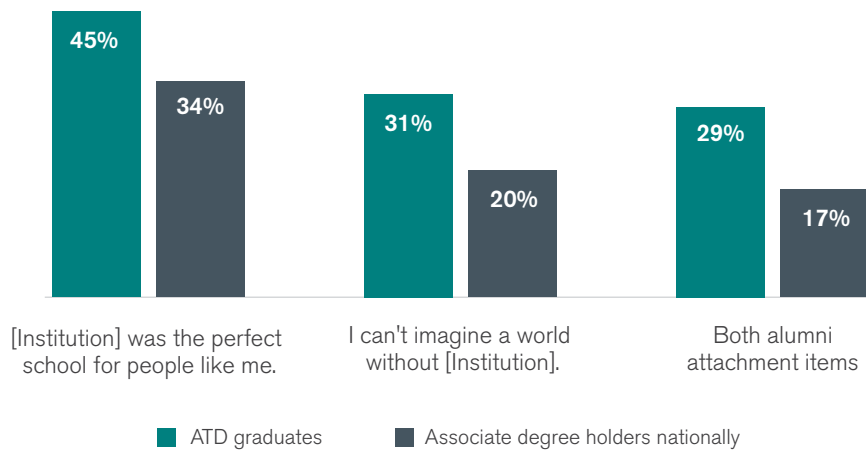
Great Advocates: Alumni Attachment

Gallup explores the emotional connection that alumni have with their alma mater by measuring their level of agreement with two statements: “I can’t imagine a world without [Institution]” and “[Institution] was the perfect school for people like me.” Graduates who strongly agree with both items are considered “emotionally attached” to their alma mater.

ATD Graduates Significantly More Likely to Be Advocates, Attached to Their Institution Compared With National Counterparts

Nearly half of ATD graduates (45%) — significantly higher than their national counterparts (34%) — strongly agree that their institution was the perfect school for them. Additionally, 31% of ATD graduates — also higher than their national counterparts (20%) — strongly agree that they can’t imagine a world without their institution. Overall, nearly a third of ATD graduates (29%) are considered emotionally attached to their institution, compared with fewer than one in five associate degree holders nationally (17%).

Alumni Attachment (Strongly agree)



FGCS (30%) and non-FGCS (29%) have similar levels of emotional attachment. However, adult learners (33%) and low-income students (31%) are more likely than younger students (28%) and non-low-income students (27%) to be attached. Low-income students (47%) — four points higher than non-low-income students — are particularly likely to strongly agree that their institution was perfect for people like them. Similarly, adult learners are 11 points more likely than younger students to strongly agree that their institution was perfect for people like them.

Alumni Attachment Among ATD Subgroups, by Income, Age and First-Generation Status (Strongly agree)

Alumni Attachment	Income		Age		First-Generation Status	
	Low-income	Non-low-income	Younger students	Adult learners	FGCS	Non-FGCS
[Institution] was the perfect school for people like me.	47%	43%	40%	51%	46%	44%
I can't imagine a world without [Institution].	33%	30%	31%	34%	32%	30%
Both alumni attachment items	31%	27%	28%	33%	30%	29%

Attachment also differs significantly by race/ethnicity. In particular, 39% of Hispanic ATD students are considered emotionally attached to their institution — a higher percentage than among black ATD students (34%), Asian ATD students (31%) and white ATD students (25%).

Alumni Attachment Among ATD Subgroups, by Race/Ethnicity (Strongly agree)

Alumni Attachment	Race/Ethnicity			
	White	Black	Asian	Hispanic
[Institution] was the perfect school for people like me.	41%	53%	44%	52%
I can't imagine a world without [Institution].	28%	36%	35%	41%
Both alumni attachment items	25%	34%	31%	39%

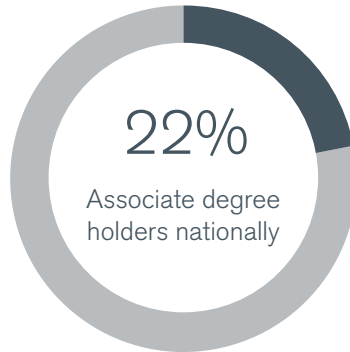
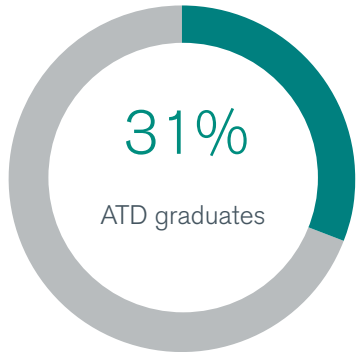
ATD Graduates Feel More Prepared for Life Outside of College, Value Their Education More Compared With National Counterparts

Nearly one-third of ATD graduates (31%) — significantly higher than associate degree holders nationally (22%) — strongly agree that their institution prepared them well for life outside of college. Over half of ATD graduates (57%) — also higher than associate degree holders nationally (39%) — strongly agree their education was worth the cost.

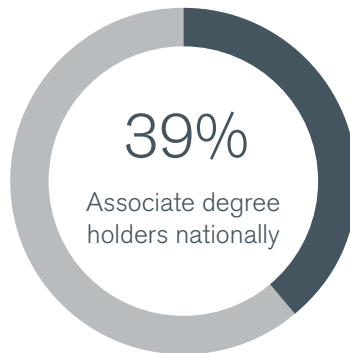
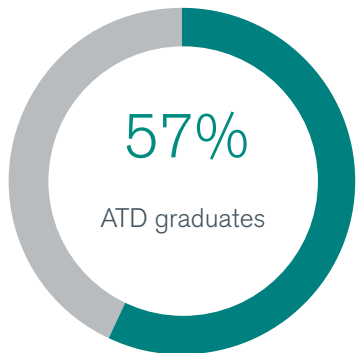


Perceptions of Preparedness and Value (Strongly agree)

[Institution] prepared me well for life outside of college.



My education from [Institution] was worth the cost.



Low-income students (33%) are more likely than non-low-income students (29%) to strongly agree their institution prepared them well for life outside of college. Similarly, adult learners (36%) are more likely than younger students (27%) to strongly agree with the same statement.

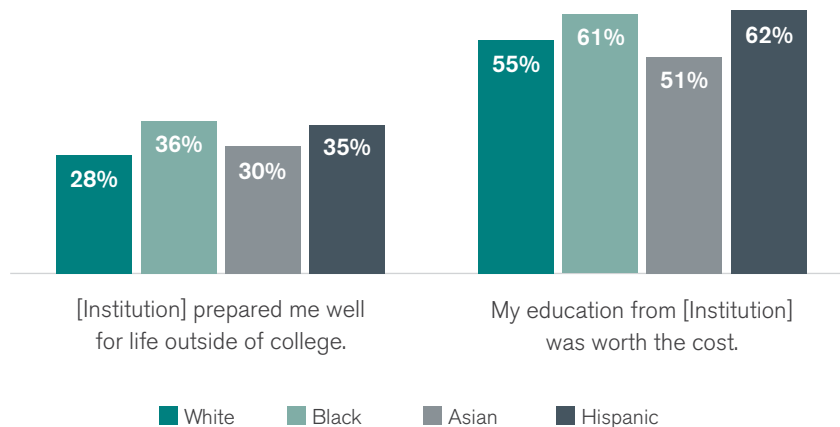
In terms of their perceptions of value, ATD graduates, regardless of income or first-generation status, strongly agree their education was worth the cost. However, adult learners (62%) are more likely than younger students (54%) to strongly agree that their education was worth the cost.

Perceptions of Preparedness and Value Among ATD Subgroups, by Income, Age and First-Generation Status (Strongly agree)

Preparedness and Value	Income		Age		First-Generation Status	
	Low-income	Non-low-income	Younger students	Adult learners	FGCS	Non-FGCS
[Institution] prepared me well for life outside of college.	33%	29%	27%	36%	32%	30%
My education from [Institution] was worth the cost.	57%	58%	54%	62%	58%	58%

Black and Hispanic alumni are the most likely to strongly agree they were prepared well for life outside of college (36% and 35%, respectively) and to strongly agree their education was worth the cost (61% and 62%).

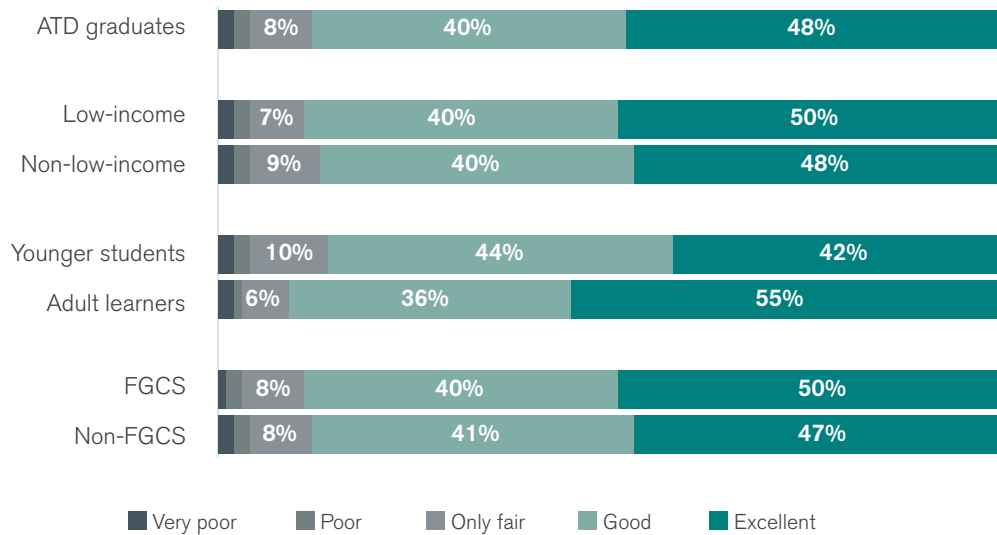
Perceptions of Preparedness and Value, by Race/Ethnicity (Strongly agree)



Overall, nearly nine in 10 ATD graduates²² rate their experience positively — 40% say their experience was “good,” and 48% say their experience was “excellent.” Adult learners (55%) are more likely than younger students (42%) to say their experience at their institution was excellent.

²² This question was not asked of Ivy Tech alumni.

Overall, how would you rate your experience at [Institution]?



Note: Question was not asked of Ivy Tech alumni. Percentages of less than 5% are not shown. Due to rounding, percentages may total 100% +/-1%.

Hispanic alumni (52%) and black alumni (51%) are the most likely to say their experience was excellent, although nearly half of white alumni and Asian alumni (47% and 46%, respectively) say the same.

Post-Collegiate Outcomes by Degree Program

Gallup disaggregated ATD’s data to examine the programmatic differences in outcomes and found that alumni in an education program or health professions program are more likely to have more positive long-term outcomes. Forty-nine percent of graduates in an education-related degree program are engaged in their workplace, and 38% are emotionally attached to their alma mater. Graduates of health professions programs are the most likely to be thriving in at least four well-being elements (28%).

Long-Term Outcome	Program Most Likely to Have Outcome
Engaged at work	Education (49%)
Felt supported in college	Education/Health professions (both 23%)
Emotionally attached to alma mater	Education (38%)
Thriving in at least four elements of well-being	Health professions (28%)
Thriving in financial well-being	Engineering^ (40%)

^ *Engineering* includes engineering technologies, engineering-related fields, and mechanic and repair technicians.

AIR provided the median wage ranges of the top 20 most popular programs for each state examined in this study. The 20 programs are grouped together based on Gallup’s categories and then examined to see how they relate to long-term outcomes.

Based on the data for each state in the study, health-related programs are the most popular across states — at least four of the top 20 programs in each state are related to a health program. Furthermore, education programs are among the top 20 programs in Florida and Indiana.

State	Median Wage Data
Florida	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health-related programs comprise seven of the top 20 associate degree programs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The median wages one year after completing one of these associate degree programs range from \$34,688 to \$52,448. • Early childhood education and teaching is one of the top 20 associate degree programs.
Texas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health-related programs comprise six of the top 20 associate degree programs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The median wages one year after completing one of these associate degree programs range from \$23,794 to \$56,525.
Tennessee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health-related programs comprise seven of the top 20 associate degree programs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The median wages one year after completing one of these associate degree programs range from \$34,688 to \$52,448.
Virginia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health-related programs comprise six of the top 20 associate degree programs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The median wages one year after completing one of these associate degree programs range from \$21,262 to \$50,164.
Indiana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health-related programs comprise four of the top 20 associate degree programs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The median wages one year after completing one of these associate degree programs range from \$23,656 to \$45,052. • Education-related degree programs comprise two of the top 20 associate degree programs.

Conclusion

Community colleges are an integral part of the higher education landscape. However, traditional measures of success do not provide a holistic view of graduates' lives, nor do they demonstrate how graduates fare years after their community college experience. This study takes a broader look at other meaningful measures of the value of a college education, such as graduates' workplace engagement, their well-being and their attachment to their alma mater. By examining how well institutions perform on these measures, leaders can structure the student experience to maximize graduates' long-term outcomes.

Generally, the results favor graduates from ATD institutions. These alumni surpass their national peers in numerous areas. ATD graduates are nearly twice as likely as associate degree holders nationally to be thriving in all five well-being elements and are more likely to be thriving in nearly all well-being elements separately. ATD graduates are as likely as associate degree holders nationally to be employed full time by an employer.

Additionally, a higher percentage of ATD graduates than associate degree holders nationally are emotionally attached to their alma mater. In particular, nearly half of ATD graduates (48%) say their experience was "excellent" at their institution, and 40% say it was "good." Nearly three in five ATD graduates (57%) strongly agree that their education was worth the cost. And while the results featured in this report focus only on graduates whose highest level of education is an associate degree, half of ATD graduates go on to achieve a bachelor's or postgraduate degree as well.

ATD's performance on many of these measures exceeds that of national comparison group institutions. These findings underscore the opportunity for administrators to promote these experiences and opportunities at each ATD institution. By elevating student participation and engagement in these experiences, ATD institutions can further maximize the long-term outcomes of their graduates, providing a solid foundation and preparing them for meaningful and productive post-collegiate lives.



Methodology

Achieving the Dream Graduates Study

Results for the ATD Graduates study are based on web surveys conducted Nov. 30-Dec. 28, 2015, for Ivy Tech Community College and May 1, 2015, to May 31, 2017, for all other institutions, with a sample of 5,702 ATD graduates. The participating ATD institutions provided the sample of alumni email addresses. Graduates were included in the study if their institution had an email address on file. All ATD institutions in this study utilized the same questionnaire used in the Gallup-USA Funds Associate Degree Graduates study. Additionally, graduates from every institution except for Ivy Tech Community College were asked five additional custom questions developed by ATD and Gallup.

Gallup-USA Funds Associate Degree Graduates Study

Results for the national Gallup-USA Funds Associate Degree Graduates study, which is used for comparison purposes, are based on web surveys conducted March 19-May 11, 2015, with a random sample of 2,548 individuals with an associate degree as their highest level of education, aged 18 and older, with internet access, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia.

The sample for this national study was recruited from the Gallup Daily tracking survey. The Gallup Daily tracking survey sample included national adults with a minimum quota of 50% cellphone respondents and 50% landline respondents, with additional minimum quotas by time zone within region. Landline and cellular telephone numbers were selected using random-digit-dial methods. Landline respondents were chosen at random within each household on the basis of which member had the most recent birthday. Gallup Daily tracking respondents with a college degree who agreed to future contact were invited to take the surveys online.

Interviews were conducted via the web, in English only. The sample was weighted to correct for unequal selection probability and nonresponse. The data were weighted to match national demographics of gender, age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, education and region. Demographic weighting targets were based on the most recent Current Population Survey figures for the aged 18 and older population with an associate degree or higher.

All reported margins of sampling error include the computed design effects for weighting.

- For results based on the total sample of those with an associate degree, the margin of sampling error is ± 4.8 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.
- For results based on employee engagement of those with an associate degree, the margin of sampling error is ± 5.8 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.

About Achieving the Dream

Achieving the Dream (ATD) leads a growing network of more than 220 community colleges committed to helping their students, particularly low-income students and students of color, achieve their goals for academic success, personal growth and economic opportunity. Network colleges represent 39 states and the District of Columbia and reach more than 4 million community college students. The three central pillars of ATD's work include coaching, innovation and connections. ATD's *coaching* helps colleges implement individualized plans to boost student achievement and equity. A conduit for *innovation*, ATD helps colleges in the network to implement and scale fresh approaches to achieve their objectives for student success. ATD fosters *connections* through network events and peer-to-peer learning. ATD is making progress on closing academic achievement gaps and accelerating student success through a holistic capacity building approach that enhances the effectiveness of these three pillars.

About American Institutes for Research

Established in 1946, with headquarters in Washington, D.C., American Institutes for Research (AIR) is a nonpartisan, not-for-profit organization that conducts behavioral and social science research and delivers technical assistance both domestically and internationally in the areas of health, education and workforce productivity. For more information, visit www.air.org.

About Gallup

Gallup delivers analytics and advice to help leaders and organizations solve their most pressing problems. Combining more than 80 years of experience with its global reach, Gallup knows more about the attitudes and behaviors of employees, customers, students and citizens than any other organization in the world.

About Sharecare

Sharecare is an independent, global well-being company that provides comprehensive improvement solutions to increase performance and lower healthcare costs in its client populations. Dedicated to creating a healthier world one person at a time, Sharecare uses the science of well-being and behavior change to produce and measure well-being improvement for its customers. Sharecare provides personalized support to individuals to optimize each participant's health and productivity and to reduce health-related costs, and also advises leaders on how to maximize well-being across an organization.

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