



# Satisfaction of university graduates: What does it tell us?

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**Abstract** Is the satisfaction of university graduates explained by their pre-university background, by the nature and financial returns of the professional work in which they are now engaged, or by other factors? This paper seeks to provide some quick answers to this question. This study focuses on the relative impact of variables that have a direct and indirect effect on work satisfaction and satisfaction with the university's degree program. The data include measures of satisfaction of 587 graduates from two professional degree programs, psychology and teaching, who studied in three universities in Chile. Correlational and path analysis link graduates' satisfaction to family background, type of secondary school, employment in the public or private sector, and salary. The graduates' level of satisfaction was found to vary by degree program and level of university prestige but also by their current salary and satisfaction with the conditions of their employment. Expressions

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of satisfaction by graduates tell us as much about their jobs as they do about the quality of their university formation.

**Keywords** Graduate satisfaction · University prestige · Path analysis · Employment

University relationships with graduates are essential. They serve several purposes. First, graduates can influence the educational spending of future prospective students, or “consumers” as they are identified by the university’s marketing department (Senior et al., 2017; Thomas & Galambos, 2016; Wilkins et al., 2013). Testimonials from graduates provide material to improve the university’s public image and consequently their ability to attract applicants and donors. Tracing graduates can provide evidence useful for recruiting and fundraising (Ebert et al., 2017; Schomburg, 2014; Snijders et al., 2019).

Little is known about how Chilean graduates, once they are employed, perceive their university formation (Espinoza et al., 2024). Some studies have focused on graduates from the traditional professions, such as engineering or medicine (Caprara et al., 2006; Sears et al., 2017; Soto-Hernández & Díaz, 2018). As demand has saturated, interest has grown in other fields of study. Teaching had previously attracted mainly students from low-income families, but universalization of secondary education has attracted university students from higher-income families. Our previous work on graduates in psychology and teaching assessed the relationship between program satisfaction and work experience (Espinoza et al., 2019, 2022). The first paper showed that current employment experience influenced graduates’ retrospective evaluation of the university degree program. The second paper found that other factors influenced levels of satisfaction with the degree program. When we took these other factors into account, the relationship between job satisfaction and program satisfaction was reduced.

This article reports on responses to the same questionnaire by an enlarged sample of graduates. It focuses on the relative impact of variables that have a direct and indirect effect on work satisfaction and satisfaction with the university’s degree program. Is program satisfaction explained principally by graduates’ pre-university background, by the nature and financial returns of the professional work in which they are now engaged, or by other factors?

## Literature review

### Satisfaction with the university experience

Research in Spain (Beerli & Pérez, 2002), India (Thomas & Galambos, 2016), Lebanon (Azoury et al., 2013), Thailand (Kunanusorn & Puttawong, 2015), and Spain (Iriondo, 2022) has demonstrated that cognitive responses—for example, the perceived importance, value, or utility of an event or situation—precede the affective response of satisfaction. If we achieve what we were seeking, we feel good and are satisfied (Westbrook & Reilly, 1983).

Satisfaction is influenced also by direct experience. This was shown clearly by the 1998 Higher Education and Graduate Employment in Europe Study known as CHEERS. Researchers surveyed 3000 graduates from 11 European countries and Japan four years after graduation. The questionnaire asked their reaction to environmental factors, field of