



Conference of Southern Graduate Schools

Lessons from the Bayou

Strengthening the Graduate Ecosystem

Helping Students Navigate Career Ecosystems: Approaches from Two Institutions

Patti Giuffre, Andrea Golato, Eric Paulson, Texas State University
Irene Aiken, UNC Pembroke

Moderator: Clay Green, Texas State University

Beyond the Resume

Patti Giuffre, Andrea Golato, Eric Paulson





TXST Facts

- **Located in San Marcos, TX, exactly between Austin and San Antonio**
- **41,283 students total**
- **5,345 graduate students (811 doc students)**
- **21 doctoral programs, over 100 master's programs**
- **Hispanic-Serving Institution**
- **Currently R2 but on the path to becoming an R1**
- **Located on two campuses and online**

Background / Literature

- Importance of professional development (PD) in grad ed (Bellows & Weissinger, 2004; Button et al., 2025; Mitic & Okahana, 2021a, 2021b)
- Typical areas of PD: Research, writing, time-management, well-being, career development
- Career development offerings typically less robust (Kuizin, 2024; Wolfgramm & Zhou, 2024)
- Graduate students = adult learners, who often have unique career-related PD needs compared to traditional-age students (Bohonos, 2014; Hardaway et al., 2023; Moeggenberg, 2022)
- For faculty positions, advisor and other faculty play key role (Wendler et al. 2012)
- Students today interested in variety of career paths for which faculty have little expertise (Kuizin, 2024; Wolfgramm & Zhou, 2024, Woolston, 2022),
- Students are also often uncertain about career paths (Woolsten, 2022)



Career exploration should be included in graduate training

(Augustine et al., 2025; Chatterjee et al., 2019; Coffield et al., 2021).

Master's Career Pathways: Exit Survey Project

- In 2022, The Graduate College (Golato, PI; Paulson Co-PI; Giuffre, Co-PI) was one of 12 institutions awarded a subaward from the Council of Graduate Schools' project titled *Understanding Roles of Master's Education in Entry Into, and Upskilling and Reskilling for, the STEM Workforce* (NSF award #2100343).

SECTION 1. EDUCATION PATHWAY

A. Your Undergraduate Degree

B. Your Current Master's Degree

C. Beginning Your Master's Program

D. Your Master's Program Experience

SECTION 2. PURSUING A MASTER'S DEGREE

E. Your Motivation for Pursuing a Master's Degree

SECTION 3. CAREER PATHWAY

F. Your Career Pathway

F1-3. Your Current Job/Prior Job/Not Working

SECTION 4. PROFESSIONAL ASPIRATIONS

G. Your Professional Aspirations

SECTION 5. FURTHER EDUCATION

H. Your Next Steps

SECTION 6. SOCIODEMOGRAPHICS

Participants

905 responses

Respondent Demographics		
Gender	Male	28.7%
	Female	68.8%
	Gender non-binary	1.5%
	Prefer to self-describe	1.0%
Race	American Indian/Alaska Native	4.3%
	Asian	5%
	Black or African American	6.6%
	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0.9%
	White	83%
Ethnicity	Hispanic/Latinx	27.8%
	Not Hispanic/Latinx	72.2%
Age	≤ 25	11.9%
	26-30	38.7%
	31-35	18.5%
	36-40	9.8%
	41-45	7%
	46-50	4.6%
	> 50	9.6%

Focus

Q23. Satisfaction. Please rate the following aspects of your current master's program. [SCALE: Poor; Fair; Neutral; Good, Excellent]

Q23_ 1. Curriculum

Q23_ 2. Faculty

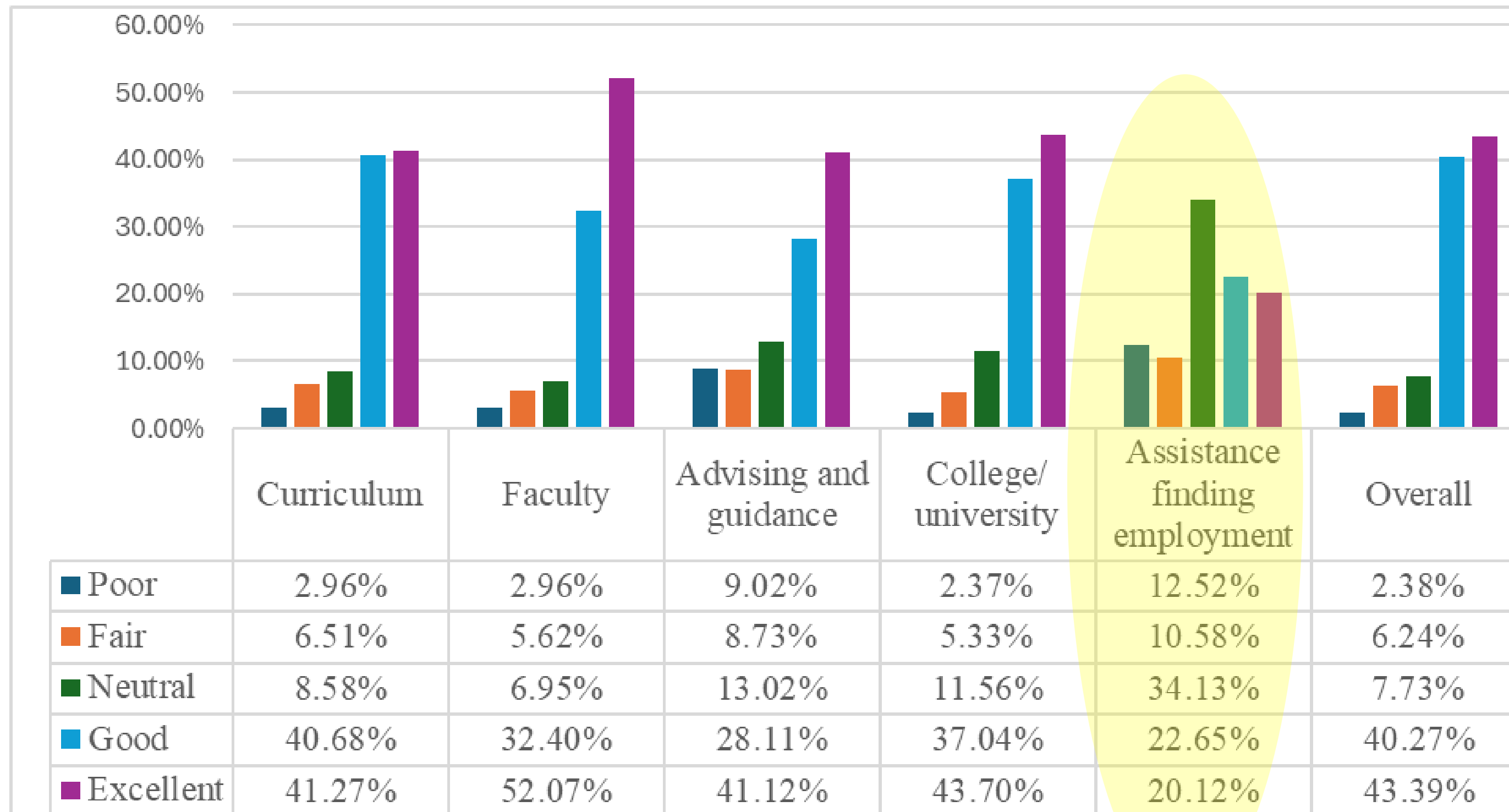
Q23_ 3. Advising and guidance

Q23_ 4. College/university

Q23_ 5. Assistance finding employment

Q23_ 6. Overall

"Please rate the following aspects of your master's program"



Did PD impact respondents' ratings to the "assistance finding employment" question

Impact of Professional Development on Satisfaction with Employment Assistance

Model	<i>b</i>	SE B	B	<i>p</i>
(Constant)	3.085	.069		.000
International experience	.242	.147	.065	.100
Study at US college or university other than my own	.061	.193	.012	.750
Coursework outside my discipline	-.083	.112	-.028	.461
Program or experience to prepare job materials	.415	.098	.163	.000

$F(4, 666) = 5.963, p < .001, R^2 = .035$

Dependent Variable: Respondents' satisfaction with assistance finding employment during their master's degree program

This outcome prompted us to consider how to increase our PD offerings in this area.

Using the MES to Develop New Career Initiatives

- The MES analysis demonstrated needs for
 - resources specific to economic sectors or job type (e.g., industry, nonprofit)
 - focused information on a particular economic sector that is reinforced each week



A Thematic Approach to Career Exploration

- We focus on one economic sector each semester
 - (1) Include a resource specific to the sector in the weekly graduate student newsletter
 - (2) Organize a panel of successful alumni who are employed in that sector



Examples Of career exploration themes

- Careers in Industry
- Careers in Nonprofits
- Faculty Careers
- Postdoctoral positions



Weekly Newsletter Resources: Fall/Spring into Your Career

TEXAS STATE
THE GRADUATE COLLEGE

GradBulletin

Announcements regarding your graduate degree.



SPRING INTO YOUR CAREER

[How to Jump-start your Industry Job Search](#) offers strategies for Ph.D. students looking to join the industry with advice on resumes, cover letters, and interviews.

SPRING INTO YOUR CAREER

[How to Prepare for Job Interviews Outside Academe](#) provides clear guidance for academics transitioning into industry careers with practical advice to reframe your academic skills to non-academic employers.

SPRING INTO YOUR CAREER

[Working in Science: Science Industry Vs. Academia](#) highlights the key differences in job responsibilities, work-life balance, career progressions, and skill requirements in industry jobs vs. academia jobs.

Panel of Alumni and Career Services Staff

From Academia to Industry:
Alumni Perspectives on
Corporate Career Paths

Description

Are you curious about how to turn your graduate school experience into a thriving career in industry? As a graduate student, you've honed advanced problem-solving, research, and analytical skills—but how do you translate those strengths into a corporate setting? Join us for an exclusive panel discussion featuring successful Texas State graduate alumni who have made the leap from academia to industry. They'll share insights on how they navigated their transitions, leveraged their graduate training, and built rewarding careers outside academia. In this interactive session, you'll gain practical strategies for:

- *Identifying and marketing your transferable skills
- *Navigating the job search process beyond academia
- *Building a strong professional network
- *Positioning yourself for success in a corporate environment

Thematic Career Exploration

- Demystifies the job search
- Allows students to hear from alumni and ask specific questions (e.g., what are nonprofit jobs like?)
- Makes alumni feel honored to be invited (they love to share their experiences!), creating more connections with them
- Is particularly helpful for students in fields with less defined career paths (e.g., Sociology)



Thank you!

Questions for us?





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GRADUATE SCHOOL

Graduate Career Readiness

From Exploration to Interview to Professional Presence

Dr. Irene Pittman Aiken, Dean



WHY THIS MATTERS

- **Graduate students interview often (jobs, internships, residencies, assistantships, professional programs)**
- **Interview readiness affects:**
 - **placement outcomes**
 - **time-to-employment**
 - **program reputation**
- **Career Services cannot do this work alone at scale**





Career Mapping

Career mapping answers the first student question:

“What can I do with this degree?”



Career mapping tools connect:

- majors and degrees
- skills and competencies
- occupations and industries

Supports:

- advising
- recruitment conversations
- student confidence and persistence



THE HANDOFF

Career mapping shows students
where they're going —
interview preparation determines
whether they get there.





WILLIAM HOWARD DEAN
GRADUATE SCHOOL

BIG INTERVIEW: WHAT IT IS

- AI-enabled interview preparation and career-readiness platform
- Used by colleges and universities
- Supports:
 - job interviews
 - internships
 - professional school interviews
 - advanced academic interviews
- Combines:
 - instruction
 - structured practice
 - immediate AI feedback
- Available 24/7





WHY BIG INTERVIEW WORKS

Why this works at scale

- Students record real interview responses
- AI feedback is generated for responses over 30 seconds
- Feedback includes:
 - filler words
 - tone
 - rate of speech
- Students receive an action plan for improvement

Reduces staff bottlenecks while maintaining quality



Iris Air Photo Booth

Professional presence should not depend on personal resources

- Students need professional photos for:
 - LinkedIn
 - job and internship applications
 - professional programs
 - conference bios
- Many graduate students lack access to affordable, high-quality headshots
- The Iris Air Photo Booth provides:
 - low-barrier
 - equitable access
 - consistent quality





Graduate Career Readiness as a System

Career mapping
— clarity and
direction

Big Interview —
structured
preparation and
practice

Photo booth —
professional
identity and
confidence



WHAT YOU CAN DO

How graduate programs can plug in (low lift)

Orientation: Encourage one career-mapping activity

Milestones: Recommend or require one Big Interview practice set

before internships

before assistantships

before job searches

Visibility: Promote the photo booth as part of professional readiness