

RESEARCH REVIEW

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About This Issue:

In 1990, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization made a World Declaration recognizing the importance of *Education for All* in “providing humanity with the capacity to control its own development”. A significant prerequisite for accessible education is the participation of all stakeholders in the “educational process with a policy based on alliance and partnership”, states the UN. The reports featured in this month’s Research Review shed light on some of the educational barriers faced by Canadian students.

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Education is closely tied to socioeconomic status, and effective education for children and lifelong learning for adults are key contributors to health and prosperity for individuals, and for the country. Education contributes to health and prosperity by equipping people with knowledge and skills for problem solving, and helps provide a sense of control and mastery over life circumstances. It increases opportunities for job and income security, and job satisfaction. And it improves people's ability to access and understand information to help keep them healthy.

-Public Health Agency of Canada

Thank You to Our Volunteer Researchers & Writers:

Jennifer Taylor, Adiba Sanjana, Anjil Shimon, Lilian Lai, Darlene Lau, Sheida Azimi, Mona Bacon, Ryan Dexter and Albert Muhigi



Borwein, S. (2014). The Great Skill Divide: A Review of the Literature. Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

Reviewed by Ryan Dexter, Volunteer Researcher and Writer

Sophie Borwein's report examines the alleged skill gap debate in Canadian education. Going through the relevant literature, Borwein examined four commonly expressed claims, in an effort to answer the commonly expressed questions concerning the skill gap: "What constitutes a skill gap or a labour shortage?"; "To what extent do these problems plague Canada" and "what (if anything) should we do about it?"

Borwein's findings indicated a disagreement in the literature regarding the size and reason for Canada's skill gap. Moreover, Borwein questions whether such as skill gap exists at all.

Claim #1: Canada will not have enough post-secondary graduates to meet future demand for high-skilled workers (Borwein, 2014, p. 8)

This claim was initially reported by Rick Milner who suggested that Canada, and especially Ontario, "faces a looming skills and labour crisis" (Borwein, 2014). Specifically, Milner argued Canada will see increased demand for labour as baby boomers retire and the working age population shrinks, while the remaining labour force will require additional training at the post-secondary level to meet demand (Borwein, 2014). Currently, 66.6% of people aged 25 to 34 have attained a post-secondary level of education in Ontario, while Miner forecasts 77% of employment opportunities will require post-secondary education in Ontario by 2031 (Borwein, 2014).

In response to Miner's report, the federal government produced its own estimates by using the Canadian Occupation Projection System (COPS). COPS is considered a more systematic tool because it models the components of labour demand and supply individually. COPS suggested that 69.8% of jobs created over the following 10 years will require some form of post-secondary education (Borwein, 2014), a lower number than Miner reported. COPS also predicts that 71.1% of people leaving school will have post-secondary education in the next ten years, meaning there will be no shortage of skilled workers in the next decade.

Claim #2: Canadian post-secondary students are graduating with the wrong credentials to meet current and future labour market demands (Borwein, 2014, p. 10).

It is often reported that certain occupations face skills shortages, though which occupations is open to debate. For example, some evidence supports the claim that skilled trades are facing skill shortages, though these subjective reports should be taken with a grain of salt, as they can be used by employers to shape policy in their favour (Borwein, 2014).

Reports from COPS and Benjamin Tal's computed lists suggest evidence does not support the claim that skilled trades are experiencing labour shortages. However, high skill occupations are highly ranked by COPS and Tal's lists of jobs facing labour shortages, meaning Canada should graduate more students from post-secondary institutions. However, an alternative position states students are enrolling in the wrong programs, such as the humanities and the liberal arts.

It's also argued that the large proportion of liberal arts graduates has resulted in a skills mismatch, as these graduates end up in low-skilled employment for which they are over-qualified (1/3 of graduates work in jobs in which they are over-qualified) (Borwein, 2014).

Claim #3: Canadian students have the right credentials but lack the essential skills employers require (Borwein, 2014, p. 20)

It is reported that employees have the right credentials, but lack the necessary soft skills such as literacy, numeracy, working with others as well as personal attributes such as “determination, confidence and persistence” (Borwein, 2014). For example, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce reported deficiencies in nine essential skills, such as reading and writing. The Conference Board of Canada surveyed employers in Ontario, who reported 70% of workers have “insufficient critical thinking and problem solving skills” (Borwein, 2014 and 46% of the workers “lack oral communication skills” (Borwein, 2014).

Claim #4: Students have the right skills but lack work experience (Borwein, 2014, p. 24)

This is a commonly stated belief by recent graduates looking for an entry level job. In his book *Why Good People Can't Get Jobs*, Andrew Cappelli suggests this is due to the hiring practices of employers rather than a skills gap (p. 24). Since little or no job experience is provided in post-secondary institutions, employer training was the means by which recent graduates sought to get experience for their first job (Borwein, 2014). Cappelli suggests the problem is that employers do not want to invest the time, money and resources to train new employees, and thus high unemployment rates amongst youth are seen even while labour shortages are evidenced.

In support of this view, The Conference Board of Canada indicated that “employer spending on training and development declined from \$1207 to \$705 per employee” between 1993 and 2013 (Borwein, 2014). Employers responded by stating they are willing to train the right individual, should that individual display the right essential skills for the position. Since employers may see post-secondary education as inadequately training individuals for the workforce, they do not rely on credentials for proof of adequate competency.

Evident in the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario’s report was the level of disagreement as well as the many competing perspectives at play, such as employers, employees, recent graduates, post-secondary institutes and research organizations. No clear path for policy makers is yet evident, and debate continues over the best course of future action.

This report is of use to many, especially young people embarking on post-secondary education, as well as recent graduates who face the job market for the first time. It provides perspectives on this lived reality, as well as guides rational courses of action. Postsecondary institutions would benefit from this article as the concerns of employers are expressed, and might give reason to adjust academic programs.

Of note, this article fails to clearly differentiate between levels of post-secondary education, though it was mentioned that high-skilled occupations are experiencing high labour demands. It is not clear if masters and doctoral program graduates find employment which meets their acquired skill level in every faculty, especially the liberal arts and humanities. Perhaps more could be done in post-secondary institutions to better prepare all students, but particularly liberal arts and humanities graduates, for the work force through job placements, internships of practical skill development workshops. In this way, the university could potentially help fill any existing gap between skills demand and supplied between employers and employees.

Full Report Available Here: <http://bit.ly/1LaVmqc>

MacLaren, J. (2014). *It's Complicated: An Interprovincial Comparison of Student Financial Aid*.

Centre for Policy Alternatives

Reviewed by Lilian Lai, Volunteer Researcher and Writer

Provincial, territorial and federal governments have independent autonomy over the standards and processes of student financial aid administration. This report, written by Jordan MacLaren, provides a comparative analysis of Canada's complicated student financial aid process. Focusing on tuition cost, coverage of other eligible expenses, eligibility and application requirements, MacLaren effectively shows the intricate nature of student financial aid and the resulting inequality gaps.

To set a baseline for analysis, MacLaren's student profile is specific to non-visible minority, family of four, with dual parent income, and one child in high school and one child in their second year of a bachelor degree. Given the uncertain nature of student aid and formulary change, this report is based on the 2013-2014 academic year. Under MacLaren's research analysis, parental income is the only variable in this household profile.

The federal formula to determine student aid eligibility is: "allowable cost – resources = assessed need" (MacLaren, 2014). Federal government offers a Canada wide financial student aid program – Canada Student Loans Program (CSLP) which covers 60% of the assessed need in provinces that participate in this program. The remaining 40% is covered by different provincial programs. Jurisdictions like Quebec, Northwest Territories and Nunavut, which do not participate in CSLP, are responsible for the student's entire assessed need. MacLaren's report has four key findings, which speak to the complexity and inequality of provincial and territorial systems.

The first finding relates to the complexity and inconsistency, which lacks transparency and accountability. MacLaren ranks the complexity of student aid eligibility based on the number of steps and information needed during the application process. Using this step system, Ontario attains the highest complexity score among all provinces, as students require 94 different steps when applying for loans. Alberta ranks second, with 59 steps, while the least complex system belongs to the Northwest Territories, at 17 steps. As McLaren states the complexity score does not reflect "fairness, effectiveness, or appropriateness" (MacLaren, 2014) of the assessed need.

Ranking the Complexity of Student Aid Eligibility By Province
Complexity Score

94	Ontario
59	Alberta
49	Québec
48	Saskatchewan
47	Manitoba
47	Prince Edward Island
46	New Brunswick
44	British Columbia
44	Nova Scotia
43	Newfoundland & Labrador
26	Yukon
18	Nunavut
17	Northwest Territories

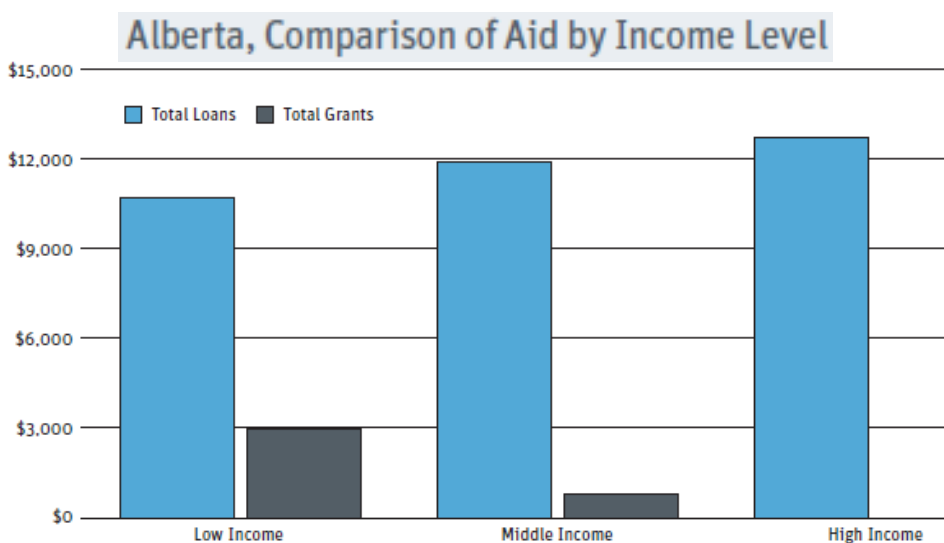
complexity score does not reflect "fairness, effectiveness, or appropriateness" (MacLaren, 2014) of the assessed need.

The second finding touches on inequality. MacLaren's Intraprovincial analysis indicates that the financial resources obtained by students greatly vary between provinces. This is because each province has different administrative processes and eligibility targets. For example, because Quebec does not participate in the CSLP, parents are required to contribute the highest portion, which is one fifth to one half (MacLaren, 2014) of the net family income.

As has been well documented in recent years, the cost of education continues to rise. MacLaren's third finding reiterates this trend. Throughout Canada, the cost of education has become the main cause of debt among students and recent graduates. Research indicates debt ratio positively correlated to the cost of tuition.

Fourth, provincial grant programs have the largest impact on reducing student loans. While most of the provinces set a cap for a student's loan, Alberta is the only one that does not have such a policy. For instance, the maximum a student in Ontario can receive through student loans is capped at \$7,300 per academic year. Once this cap is reached, the remaining aid is funded in the form of the Ontario Student Opportunity Grant. This type of policy is non-existent in Alberta. As such, Alberta's students may accumulate up to \$61,000 of student loans upon the completion of a 4-year bachelor degree (MacLaren, 2014)

While Alberta participates in the CSLP program, the government takes a unique approach to how aid is calculated. Whereas other provinces factor in parental contributions, financial aid is not contingent on this in Alberta. As MacLaren states "regardless of household income level, students receive aid that corresponds to their allowed expenses, whether through the federal and provincial government or the provincial government alone.



Overall, this report provides an insightful overview of Canada's student financial aid system to stakeholders of educational institutions including the admission staff, professors, middle income students', union's staff, as well as officers from any student aid program for evaluation of the current system.

However, MacLaren does not explain the rationale of utilizing this household profile. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized because of the variety of families with different composition and ethnic backgrounds. For example, the limited student profile assumes a student will not be eligible for other programs that targets visible minorities, students with disabilities, and provide financial relief to students with dependents.

As such, students within this profile are more likely to rely on student loans to finance their education (MacLaren, 2014). Thus, the accumulated debt by students from each province is not accurately reflected. Furthermore, the study only shows the basic comparison among each province, but it does not discuss which systems are most effective in meeting the student's financial needs. Further studies should be conducted to determine whether these programs truly reflect student needs and whether provinces should standardize the eligibility of student aid.

Full Report Available Here: <http://bit.ly/1X3EvuA>

Gilham, C., & Williamson, J. (2014). Inclusion's confusion in Alberta
International Journal of Inclusive Education, 18:6, 553-566
Reviewed by Darlene Lau, Volunteer Researcher and Writer

Inclusion's Confusion in Alberta is a commentary on reforms made to Alberta Education's inclusive education policy and is based on a six year period following publicly available information about these policies. The report is intended for academics, teachers and anyone interested in the state of the education system or special needs education in Alberta. Gilham and Williamson are upfront about their intentions to promote activism and discourse on inclusive education. As such, the authors present a case in favour of developing a "truly inclusive education system".

According to Alberta Education, an inclusive education system is based on "understanding a student's strengths and needs through [collaboration] in which teachers, parents, students and specialists... identify supports and services that best match the student's strength and needs" (p.558). This model supports a learning environment where "all students have equitable opportunity to be included in the typical environment or program of choice."

This perspective is different than the traditional special education model which promotes the medical model of disability. The traditional model allow schools to place students in different settings based on the type of pathology or disability diagnosed. Gilham and Williamson oppose the traditional model because it "stigmatises labelled students as abnormal, subnormal, or bearing deficits" (p.554). Furthermore, the authors argue that diagnosing a student as having special needs often "encloses student differences as problems inherent to the student thereby concealing what may be larger systemic problems in the current educational model."

In the fall of 2007, a review of 'severe disabilities profiles' by Alberta Education raised questions on the current approach to special needs education. At the time, there were over 16,000 students diagnosed as having severe disabilities. Between the school years of 2001-2002 to 2012-2013, students coded as having a severe disability were assigned provincial dollars (\$16,645 per student) in addition to block funding that went towards basic instructional costs and funding for mild to moderate categories of disability. Although school boards were required to document what specialized services were necessary for students who were coded, the use of funding was ultimately at the school boards' discretion.

The assignment of additional funds based on students identified with a severe disability is known as the bounty phenomenon. The authors find this troubling because students are being wrongly labelled as a means for schools to increase gain revenue. Between 1998 and 2003 where the general school population only rose by five percent, there was an increase of 64% in the identification of students with severe disabilities and a 140% increase in students with mild or moderate disabilities. Secondly, the results of the review found that 48% of the files submitted did not conform to Alberta Education's criteria. Not only is this perpetuating the stigmatization and disabling of students, the increased coding of students as severely disabled creates a growing demand on specialists, such as school psychologists, and further reinforces the need for a parallel education system for coded students.

These findings led Alberta Education to conduct an inquiry into special education, known as *Setting the Direction*. David Hancock (Minister of Education at the time) promised reforms to develop policy, accountability measures and a funding mechanism. The working group produced a set of reforms known as *Action on*

Inclusion suggested a shift towards an inclusive education system. The proposed shift was student focused, based on individual need to ensure success by accepting responsibility over all students.

The transition, however, was short lived. In 2012 Alberta Education abruptly turn on its stance when the *Action on Inclusion* website and *Setting the Direction* materials were removed. A short statement replaced the former recommendations indicating that the projects no longer existed, but work continues as a part of the Ministry's practice to build an inclusive education system in Alberta. Another small, but significant change, was made to the policy statement when the original goal to have students in typical learning environments was replaced with appropriate learning environments. The slight change implied that Alberta Education may not be keen on progressing beyond the old model.

The authors are concerned about Alberta Education's confusing position on this topic. Alberta Education states that inclusion is the preferred learning environment, but the policy shift (as seen in policies and public messages) make it seem as though this goal has already been accomplished. By declaring the task complete, Alberta Education appears to support an inclusive system, while not taking steps to achieve it. For example, although Alberta Education depicts the image of having an inclusive environment, it continues to promote a culture focused on results and not social democracy.

For example, the education system still relies heavily on the use of standardized tests and the publication of test results to show how Alberta is developing a highly skilled and knowledgeable workforce to "ensure Alberta sustains its competitive advantage in a global economy" (p.560). Educational planning and resources will be directed to ensuring mainstream learners excel, leaving those with challenges behind. Gilham and Williamson pose a fundamental question: "How can we call our educational system inclusive, as a place of beliefs and practices that value diversity as human life, while at the same time directly frame children and youth who are different as disabled, sick or abnormal?" (p.560).

This uncertainty continued in December 2012 when the *School Act* was extensively revised. Changes included a province-wide curriculum re-design and a "re-visioning of the values of education around core competencies". Some notable advances towards inclusion include removing the need to provide annual emotional and behavioural disabilities assessments following an initial assessment and replacing funding for severe disabilities with an inclusive education fund initiative.

Despite this, Gilham and Williamson worry that some of the existing policies normalize disability as a rights discourse, thereby continue to support the traditional model. They believe most changes Alberta Education has made are related to funding and not the core issues surrounding meaningful education for all students.

While the authors are forthcoming about their position, the strong tone in the report causes one to raise the question of information bias. Are Gilham and Williamson selective in what information is presented from their six years of following Alberta Education's policies or how their research is interpreted?

Full Report Available Here: <http://bit.ly/1PtjNSJ>

Shaker, E., & Macdonald, D. (2014). Tier for Two: Managing the Optics of Provincial Tuition Fee Policies. Centre for Policy Alternatives .

Reviewed by Anjil Shimon, Volunteer Researcher and Writer

“Tier for Two: Managing the Optics of Provincial Tuition Fee Policies” is written by Erika Shaker and David Macdonald from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Aimed at educators, students, parents, and advocates, this report provides a detailed account on provincial tuition structures and student assistance programs for post-secondary education. Moreover, this report details tuition fee trends and predictions for the future of costs for post-secondary education in Canada.

Tuition and Fees

Tuition rates have steadily increased across all provinces, with the exception of Newfoundland and Labrador. While the Canadian average for tuition and fees was \$2,320 in 1993/1994, tuition rose to \$6,885 for the 2014/2015 school year. By 2017/18, the authors estimate average tuition fees will further increase to \$7,755 (an increase of 12.6%). As governments reduce funding for post-secondary education, the authors argue that more and more of the costs are being born by students through increases in tuition and other fees. Between 1991 and 2011 the amount of public funding as a share of total university revenue decreased from 79% to 55%. Over the same time period, tuition fees as a share of revenue increased from 18% to 37%.

Tuition and Compulsory Fees for Full-Time Undergraduates (\$Current)

Year	Canada	NL	PEI	NS	NB	QC	ON	MB	SK	AB	BC
1993–94	\$2,320	\$2,120	\$2,801	\$2,910	\$2,520	\$1,755	\$2,497	\$2,502	\$2,436	\$2,524	\$2,441
2013–14	\$6,589	\$2,866	\$6,308	\$6,851	\$6,592	\$3,456	\$8,162	\$4,334	\$6,882	\$6,695	\$5,657
2014–15p	\$6,885	\$2,871	\$6,479	\$7,067	\$6,821	\$3,865	\$8,474	\$4,588	\$7,226	\$6,834	\$5,767
2017–18p	\$7,755	\$2,888	\$7,060	\$7,760	\$7,572	\$4,714	\$9,483	\$5,446	\$8,365	\$7,471	\$6,111
14–15 to 17–18	13%	1%	9%	10%	11%	22%	12%	19%	16%	9%	6%
14–15 to 17–18	\$870	\$16	\$581	\$694	\$750	\$848	\$1,010	\$857	\$1,139	\$637	\$344

As a result of decreased funding, post-secondary institutions have had to balance their yearly budgetary shortfall in other ways as there are caps in place which limit the amount an institution can increase tuition fees each year. This is part of the optics management alluded to in the title of the article. This has included increasing additional mandatory fees, which are largely unregulated in most provinces. These fees, which include charges for services such as recreational fees, vary across the provinces: the Canadian average for 2012/2013 was \$817 for these compulsory fees with the lowest in Newfoundland and Labrador and highest in Alberta. Post-secondary institutions have also adopted the practice of charging one set of tuition and fees to in-province students and higher rates for international students.

Student Assistance

Given the steady increases in tuition and fees, provincial governments have introduced several measures to assist students with the costs of their education. These include student loan, grant, and debt reduction programs. Shaker and Macdonald, however, indicate these programs are increasingly complex, difficult to navigate, and not very transparent. These programs are an individualized way of delivering assistance to students, as opposed to an approach more in line with providing universal access.

Provincial Highlights

Newfoundland and Labrador provide the lowest tuition and fees in the country, due to a dramatic 25% cut to tuition and fees in 2001-2003 and subsequent freezing of these rates. Tuition and fees in Newfoundland and Labrador were \$2,871 for 2014/2015 with the second lowest rates are in Quebec at \$3,865 for 2014/2015. Tuition and fees are highest in Saskatchewan and Ontario, at \$7,226 and \$8,474 respectively, for 2014/2015.

In order to compensate for the decreases in tuition and fees, universities in Newfoundland and Labrador were, until 2012/2013, receiving additional funding from the government. Moving into 2013/2014 however, there have been cuts to funding to certain post-secondary institutions and privatization of the Adult Basic Education program. In British Columbia, grants (which assist with the cost of education, and are generally non-repayable) are tied to enrollment in programs that have been prioritized by the government, while in Alberta, compulsory fees are unregulated and are the highest in the country. Interestingly, Quebec is the only province to regulate the increases to compulsory fees by tying such increases to the inflation rate yet these fees are amongst the highest in country. Despite the high compulsory fees, the rate of tuition and fees combined in Quebec is the second lowest in Canada.

Cost of Learning Index

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives compiled a useful index of the overall affordability of post-secondary education in each province. This section examines the direct costs for tuition/fees and levels of assistance to students. It also takes into account the income levels for lower and median income families in those provinces. On a national level, the authors research indicated that for lower income families, education has become 70% less affordable since 1993/1994 and the trend continues. Shaker and Macdonald also note that government policies have had a direct impact on the affordability of education over time.

Alberta

Since the 1990s, tuition costs in the province have been above the national average. In 2006, the government tied tuition fees to increases to the Consumer Price Index. However, market modifiers have allowed institutions to raise tuition for certain programs beyond the CPI increase. Compulsory fees continue to remain unregulated and are the highest in Canada. The Student Loan Relief program was cancelled in 2012 and has been replaced by Completion Grants, which provide students with significantly less relief upon graduation. As the following chart shows, Alberta is the least affordable province to pursue post-secondary education for low-income families.

Cost of Learning (Low-Income Families)

Year	NL	PEI	NS	NB	QC	ON	MB	SK	AB	BC
1993-94	2	9	10	7	1	5	6	3	8	4
2013-14	1	4	6	9	2	8	3	7	10	5
2014-15p	1	4	6	9	2	7	3	8	10	5
2017-18p	1	4	6	8	2	9	3	10	7	5

Overall, *Tier for Two* provides very detailed and useful information in an easy to understand format. It would have been helpful if the report had included information on how these increases are affecting students and families. For example, is the level of student debt (from student loans and other sources) increasing as well? Has enrollment decreased because of the increased fees and tuition? Similarly, what other strategies are available to institutions dealing with the decreased funding, and what are the costs and benefits of these strategies? Nevertheless, this report does raise important questions regarding the direction of post-secondary education, especially in regards to the goals of universal accessibility and affordability for students and families.

Full Report Available Here: <http://bit.ly/1ZDnDwY>

Lehmann et al. (2013). "Go West Young Man!" Youth Apprenticeship and opportunity Structures in Two Canadian Provinces. Journal of Education and Work, 28:1, 44-65

Reviewed by Mona Bacon, Volunteer researcher and Writer

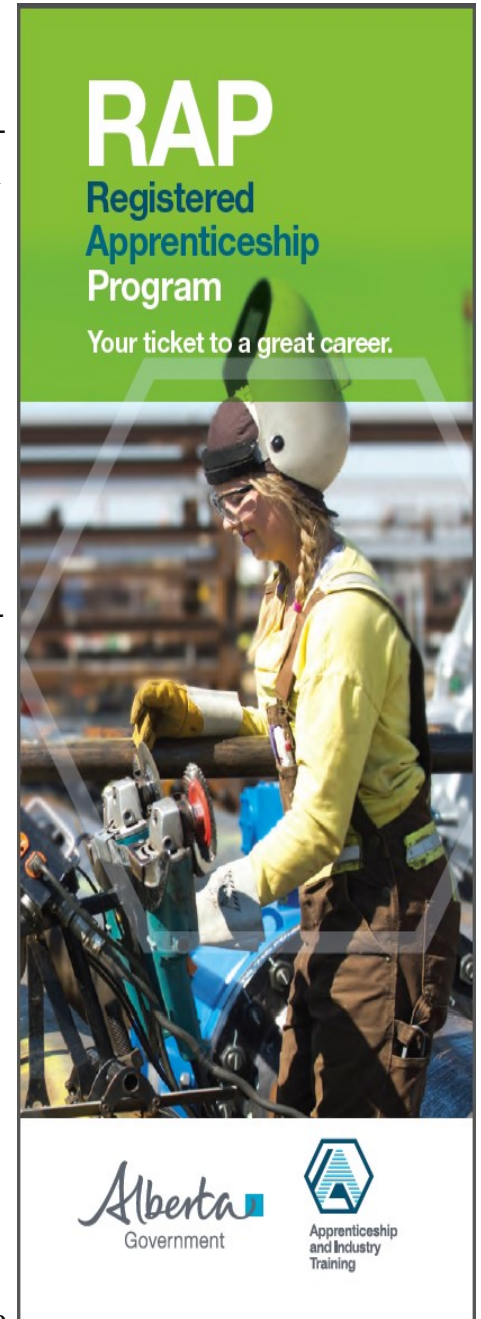
"Go West Young Man!" by Lehmann, Taylor and Hamm provides an analysis of two provincial secondary school apprenticeship programs in two geographic regions of Canada: (1) Northern Alberta's Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP) and (2) Southwestern Ontario's Ontario Young Apprenticeship Program (OYAP). The authors acknowledge that many factors influence the outcomes of these programs; however, this report is particularly concerned with the effects of regional opportunity structures on the school-work transition experiences of students. The authors end with recommendations for creating apprenticeship programs that are resistant to the "locality effect" (Lehmann et al, p. 45) of regional economic and employment conditions.

This report cites numerous studies that support the idea that young people's educational and vocational decisions are not just the result of personal ambitions, but are also "a response to the conditions in the opportunity structure in which their choices are situated" (Lehmann et al., p. 46).

In order to explore how this is true in the Canadian context, the authors conducted interviews with 10 participants from each province, aged 20 to 23 in Alberta and 22 to 26 in Ontario. These students had enrolled in high school apprenticeship programs between 2001-2006 that typified the different opportunity structures in each region: (1) Albertans in trades related to oil sands industries and (2) Ontarians in automotive technician trades.

In an attempt to limit the influence of other factors, a matching sample was selected, including two women and eight men from comparable socio-economic backgrounds. The key findings of the study are as follows:

- 7 of 10 Alberta apprentices were still working in their RAP trade at the time of the interview
- 4 of 10 Alberta apprentices had achieved their certification
- 5 of 10 Ontario apprentices had completed their automotive apprenticeships and become certified
- 4 of 10 Ontario apprentices were still working in the automotive sector at the time of the interview
- Unlike Alberta youth, the majority of Ontario youth (7 of 10) did not see their future in trades



RAP
 Registered
 Apprenticeship
 Program

Your ticket to a great career.

Alberta Government
 Apprenticeship and Industry Training

The report argues that the differences in outcomes between Alberta and Ontario youth are influenced to a large degree by the opportunity structures that exist in their respective regions. It suggests that the predominance of oil sands-related trades work and the lack of other post-secondary education opportunities in northern Alberta make trades the default training option, especially for males. In addition, the financial return on trade credentials, especially in the short term, in northern Alberta is higher (at the time of writing) than any other post-secondary education (PSE) option. Also, Alberta offers a cooperative apprenticeship program that provides support for learning in a timely way within a structured program. By contrast, access to universities and the strong availability of service sector jobs in Ontario made "apprenticeship training a less 'logical' pathway" (Lehmann et al., p. 56) for Ontario youth.

Interviews revealed that the Ontario youth who chose the apprenticeship program did so because of "a fascination with cars or the need to work with one's hands" (Lehmann et al., 56), rather than on the basis of job opportunities or wage expectations. The interviews also revealed that, "in the absence of any formal apprenticeship support structure in Ontario", all apprentices were reliant on an individual employer's support for their training and skill development. Most of the Ontario participants indicated that they lacked mentorship during their apprenticeships and were required to "be producers rather than learners" (Lehmann et al., p. 57).

The report closes by acknowledging that regional economic conditions and access to PSE options create different opportunity structures that affect the outcomes of high school apprenticeship programs. It reminds us, however, that all of the participants interviewed made their initial decisions to participate in RAP or OYAP with the intention of working in a trade. The writers argue that we need to provide positive learning and work experiences for apprentices that are "independent of local employment conditions" (Lehmann et al., p. 61). Their key recommendations are that apprentices:

- Should be exposed to learning experiences across and between companies;
- Should be given access to a range of qualified mentors;
- Should be supported to take time off for reflection and theoretical instruction;
- Should be fully mentored in their transition from outsider to full participant in their trade.

The writers argue that apprenticeship training must be structured and regulated, resulting in programs that would draw students into the trades, support them in their transition into expert workers, and address long-term labour needs in our changing economy.

This report was published in 2014, prior to the slump in oil prices and the resultant downturn in Alberta's economy. However, recent changes to the opportunity structures in Alberta make the recommendations of the authors more compelling than ever. This report should be read by educators and policy makers who are concerned with addressing both the ongoing need for skilled workers in Alberta and the needs of students who choose, for personal reasons, to pursue this historically marginalized education/career trajectory.

Full Report Available Here: <http://bit.ly/1G5FF4E>

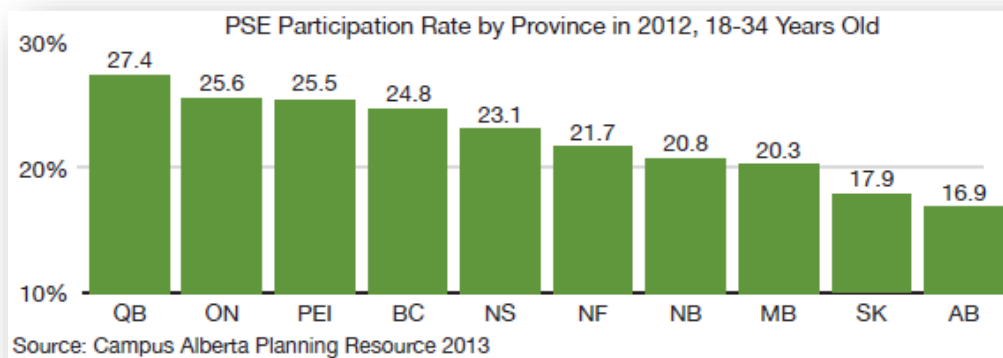
Council of Alberta University Students. (2014). *Building a Brighter Alberta*.

Reviewed by Sheida Azimi, Volunteer Researcher and Writer

The Council of Alberta University Students (CAUS) represents the interests of over 100,000 undergraduate students from the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, the University of Lethbridge, MacEwan University, and Mount Royal University to the public, government and other post-secondary education stakeholders. As a non-partisan advocacy group, CAUS meets regularly with MLAs from all political parties in Alberta. During the 2014 lobby conference CAUS representatives were able to meet with 40 MLAs (caus.net, 2015).

In 2006, under the leadership of Minister Dave Hancock, Alberta Advanced Education ushered in “A Learning Alberta”, putting forward a 20-year strategic plan with six key goals at its core. One of these goals was increase post-secondary education rates in Alberta to the highest in Canada. However, Alberta has since slipped in its post-secondary participation and now holds the lowest rate in Canada.

The CAUS report provides several recommendations under the themes of affordability, accessibility and quality as a crucial part in strengthening post-secondary education in Alberta and turning around the downward trend in participation.



Affordability: Mandatory Non-Instructional Fee/Tuition

If Alberta is to increase its post-secondary participation rate, the key is to make post-secondary education affordable for students, notes CAUS. Stable, predictable funding for post-secondary institutions is of the utmost importance as it allows students to plan for their future.

Over the past few years, post-secondary institutions in Alberta have become dependent on the revenue generated by Mandatory Non-Instructional Fees (MNIFs) to offset budget cuts. Therefore these fees are now a regular, annual component of the student financial landscape. Unlike tuition, there are no regulations surrounding MNIFs in Alberta. This allows institutions to increase MNIFs by an arbitrary level they consider appropriate.

The Council of Alberta University Students (2014) recommends regulations for MNIFs, “allowing for fee increases only after students approval through referendum or a vote at student’s council” (p.4). Also with the tuition free regulation set to expire in August 2016, it is recommended to “put the tuition cap back into the *Post-Secondary Learning Act* and tie future tuition increases to CPI” and “investigate mechanisms for ensuring tuition is affordable for international students while still covering the portion of costs that is not offset by Alberta

Accessibility: Rural & Aboriginal Bursary/ Upfront Grants & Bursaries

Accessibility refers to the cost as well as geographical access to the education students are interested in. A focus group study consisting of rural students conducted by CAUS indicated that geographic access to post-secondary education acted as the main barrier due to extra costs of moving away from home. This significantly affects Aboriginal communities, whose post-secondary attainment is 17 percent below the provincial average. CAUS (2014) recommends “the establishment of the Rural and Aboriginal Bursary promised in 2012 election to improve participation rates amongst under-represented groups” (p.6).

Over the last few years, Alberta has increased financial aid funding in the form of student loans and debt relief while simultaneously reducing the availability of scholarships, bursaries and grants. These changes have not stopped the decline in Alberta’s post-secondary participation rate. CAUS (2014) recommends establishing new forms of non-repayable student aid such as upfront, needs based, substantial, and universal grants that reduces student debt levels, balances the student financial aid system and encourages greater participation (p.6).

Quality: Student Employment/Open Educational Resources/Student Mental Health

Quality refers to student experiences with teaching, research and overall learning. It also captures the broader experiences that students gain from their time at a university campus and speaks to the value for investment for students and their families.

In 2013, the Government of Alberta suspended the Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP) which provided students with paid employment opportunities during the summer. Today, Alberta is the only province lacking this type of program. CAUS (2014) recommends for a “new student, employment program that builds off of the successes of STEP, while refocusing on a core mandate of assisting students to gain employment and build skills in areas related to their program of study”(p.7). In June 2015, the Alberta Government announced the STEP program would return for summer 2016.

In addition to the tuition and school fees, students must pay for textbooks and essential supplies. According to a study conducted by the University of Alberta, between the years 1995 to 2014, the cost of textbooks increased 2.8 times the rate of inflation. CAUS recommends an “open textbook initiative must be undertaken through Campus Alberta in collaboration with the federal government and the Council of Ministers of Education in Canada to implement a national open textbook strategy” (p.7).

In January 2013 the Government of Alberta announced that the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, and the University of Lethbridge would each receive \$3 million over three years to put towards improving student mental health. Undergraduate students of Mount Royal and MacEwan face the same pressures as their peers at other institutions, yet they were not part of the university mental health funding initiative. CAUS believes all post-secondary institutions in Alberta should be a part of any future mental health funding initiatives. Moreover, CAUS advocates for continuous funding after the initial three years at an equal or greater rate (p.7).

Full Report Available Here: <http://bit.ly/1RHTIE8>

Hatt, K. (2014). Help Not Wanted: Federal Public Service Cuts Have Hit Student Hiring Hard. Center for Policy Alternatives.

Reviewed by Jennifer Taylor, Volunteer Researcher and Writer

Written primarily for policy makers, journalists, community organizations and the general population, this report frames the problem of unemployment for students. Statistical information derived from Statistics Canada, the Canadian Government, as well as research by TD Economics and the Broadbent Institute are used to support the author's central arguments: Youth unemployment is a problem, it has long-term economic ramifications and the federal government's policy to reduce student hiring has negatively impacted students.

Kayle Hatt, researcher at the Centre for Policy Alternatives, examines why employment rates have staggered. Hatt's claim is based on national youth unemployment rate, which indicates a decline in rates from 15.2% in 2009 to 13.7% in 2014. Hatt argues this improvement is deceptive and can be explained by youth removing themselves from the job search altogether since unemployment rates only considers individuals actively seeking work.

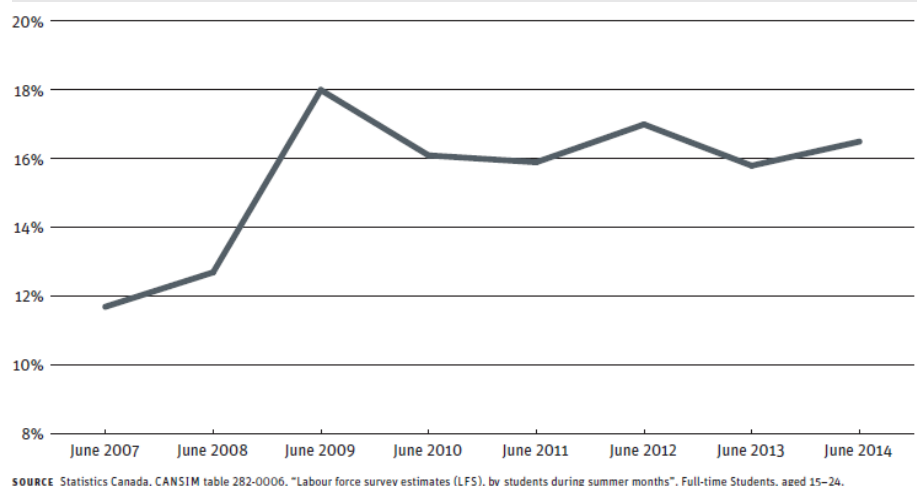
As for the effect of high unemployment on students, Hatt discusses that students often need to work to fund their education, either full-time in the summer or part-time during school. This also gives

them experience and skills that will help them get a job after graduation. The unemployment rate for full-time students however was 16.4% in June 2014, slightly lower than May of the same year, accounting for those students who found work, went to summer school, or stopped looking. Hatt (2014) found that the 2008-09 recession and the slow economic recovery had an impact on the student summer employment rate.

Although there is no consensus on the mechanisms at play, research indicates youth earn less over their career when they have experienced a period of unemployment; this is called 'scarring.' A high unemployment rate also negatively affects the starting salaries of post-secondary graduates by 9%. The cumulative cost to Canada is 1.3% (\$23 million) of our GDP over 18 years, as well as "undermining the strength and quality of Canada's human capital and underutilizing our workforce" (Hatt, 2014).

Hatt examine the decline of public sector opportunities in Canada. In 2006, the government cut the Summer Career Placement Program and replaced it with the Canada Summer Jobs program, which employs only half the number of students as the former program. \$64 million in 2012-13 had also been cut from the Youth Employment Strategy's funding. Not only has funding been cut for various programs, the government itself is hiring 36% fewer students as shown in data from 2009-2013.

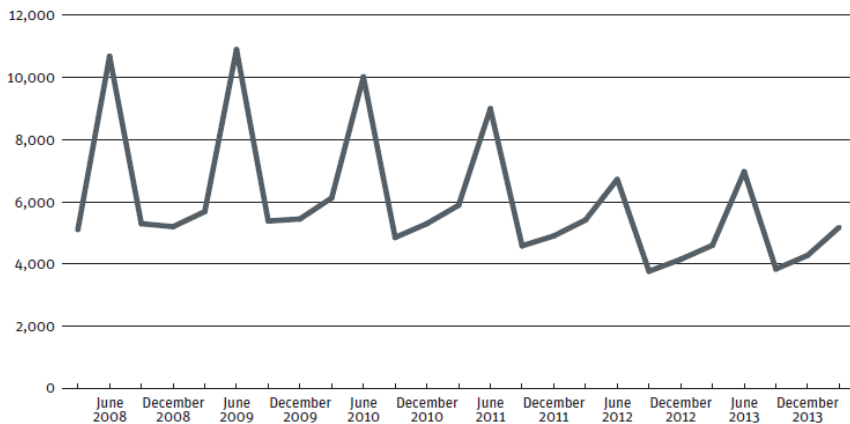
Year-Over-Year Student Summer Unemployment Rate (Full-Time Students 15-24)



It is not the author's finding that this has been done purposely by the government; it is simply a result of the government's efforts to eliminate the deficit.

In conclusion Hatt states that although the government claims to be concerned about high youth unemployment, its policies do not match this concern. Hatt (2014) finds that "from 2009 to 2013, summer hiring by government

Students Working in the Federal Public Service (Quarterly)



SOURCE: Government of Canada, "Population of the Federal Public Service by Department and Tenure". OpenData.ca, supplied by Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat. Aggregates based on author's calculations.

departments decreased from 36%, from 10,894 students in the summer of 2009 to fewer than 7,000 for the last two summers. For non-summer quarters, student staff complements decreased by an average of 23% from 2009 to 2013".

The author challenges the government to "act counter-cyclically and increase-not cut-the number of students hired" (Hatt, 2014) by its programs.

Although the author acknowledges that much research has gone into the decline in private sector opportunities for students, It would have been interesting to compare some of those findings with the federal program cuts. The author also lists several of his own articles as references; perhaps exploring a larger variety of studies would help to minimize any biases and create a stronger case.

Despite this, Hatt succeeds in presenting the issue of youth unemployment and the effects it has on youths as well as the greater population, both in terms of declining quality of human capital and lost GDP.

Full Report Available Here: <http://bit.ly/1LkxUEP>

Campbell et al. (2013). The Role of a Student-Run Clinic in Providing Primary Care for Calgary's Homeless Population: A Qualitative Study. BMC

Reviewed by Adiba Sanjana, Volunteer Researcher and Writer

A Student Run Clinic (SRC) is a widely used initiative across North America that provides accessible and quality healthcare services to disadvantaged population (Beck, 2005). Recognizing the limited exploration of SRCs role in the Canadian healthcare system and the need to better understand the potential roles of SRCs in Canada, this research article examines Calgary's free of charge SRC.

Founded by medical students from the University of Calgary in 2010 at the Calgary Drop-in and Rehabilitation Centre (CDIRC), this study explores stakeholders' point of view regarding the future development and role of SRCs in Calgary and the potential barriers that may arise.

The qualitative research methods used in this study involved individual and group semi-structured interviews targeting key stakeholders including clients, medical students, faculty members, staff, and external community agency directors. Convenience sampling was used to recruit clients. Interview transcripts used a coding template for conducting an iterative and comparative analysis.

SRCs serve vulnerable populations with poorer health status by providing primary care services they otherwise would not receive. The importance of a SRC is unquestionable as it offers assistance to uninsured patients by obtaining relevant insurance or emergency medication payment if required. As for students and other health care providers within this interprofessional environment, SRCs not only provide opportunities to engage in planning health education programs but also work for the development of social awareness (Clark et al, 2003). Working in SRCs motivate students to become primary care practitioners in future as well.

The results from this study focus on the benefits and barriers involved with SRCs. The key benefits include:

- Empathetic relationships between student providers and patients relative to typical physician-patient counterparts were facilitated.
- Student providers spent more time listening to patients and educating them.
- Students had more access to medical specialists and could make good referrals to specialists which increased the accessibility of vulnerable populations to the healthcare.
- The SRC increased the existing capacity of the CDIRC's medical services by serving more patients.
- One of the perks of having the SRC at the CDIRC was it offered evening clinic hours and home visits to the working poor.
- The SRC extended its contribution to the Faculty of Medicine's mandate areas of education and nurtured the concept of social accountability.
- Working in Calgary's SRC improved medical students' clinical reasoning and development of skills that might interest them to serve this particular population later in their medical career.

The researchers also identified some significant barriers associated with Calgary's SRC. The barriers include:

- Due to location, the SRC was only able to serve a subset of the homeless population instead of other subpopulation (e.g. families in crisis, families who were homeless, seniors) residing in different sites or who were underrepresented at the CDIRC.


 SRC

Student Run Clinic

serving Calgary's vulnerable populations at


 Inn from the Cold the alex.

- Providing longitudinal care to its patients was an issue as the clinic operated once a week and the staffs rotated each week following a schedule; hence developing a longitudinal relationship between student practitioners and patients would be a huge challenge.
- Lack of student medical knowledge and experience was considered as one of the major key barriers although that was partially mitigated by following the model used by the SRC and working in a team environment with the attending physicians.

Despite the barriers Calgary's SRC experience, this study reiterates the importance of accessible primary healthcare for homeless people. In addition, SRCs provide medical students with a broader education by working with vulnerable population. In order to foster further expansion, participants recommended the need to communicate with other organizations who have similar missions, values and goal . Furthermore, SRCs should focus more on acute care as the Calgary's SRC is not ideally suited for longitudinal care.

Selection bias was evident since most stakeholders interviewed had previous experience with Calgary's SRC as client or professional. Since the author worked in the clinic, this may have influenced how respondents answer the questions. The validity of the findings would have been stronger if the authors had spoken with a broader spectrum of vulnerable populations about their experiences about primary care.

The researchers acknowledge the need for further research, especially in terms of how SRCs can serve specific vulnerable populations including youths, families, and Aboriginal peoples.

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Full Report Available Here: <http://bit.ly/1LO8S6A>

Hicks, M., & Jonker, L. (2015). Still Worth it After All These Years. Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario .

Reviewed by Ryan Dexter , Volunteer Researcher and Writer

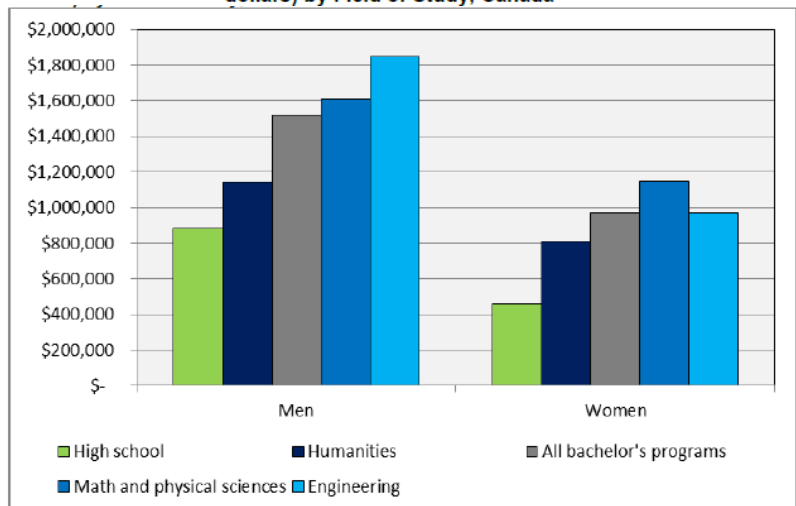
Martin Hicks and Linda Jonker of The Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) examine whether a university education is worth the time, money, and effort. By utilizing Canadian and Ontario data on the subject, the authors focus on four variables: employment premium, employment stability, return on investment, and debt load to answer whether post-secondary education is “still worth it after all these years”.

Hicks and Jonker investigated how different degree programs differed on these four variables by analyzing data from recent graduates and long-time graduates. The data presents “an optimistic view regarding the value of a university education” (Hicks and Jonker, 2015, p. 4), though income differences between programs and gender.

In terms of earning premiums, Canadian graduates born between 1955 and 1957 earned substantially more (\$730,000 for men, \$440,000 for women) than their less educated peers over a twenty year period (Hicks and Jonker, 2015). Other have presented similar findings, while noting that the earning premiums differ according to degree program.

For example, university graduates aged 26 to 35 from 1991 to 2011 earned substantially more than high school graduates; men and women with engineering degrees experienced the greatest earning premium, while graduates from humanities programs experienced the lowest earning premium amongst university graduates (Hicks and Jonker, 2015). Recent findings indicate engineering, technology, math and science graduates earn more after two years than humanities graduates.

Median Cumulative Earnings over a 20-Year Period from 1991 to 2010 (in 2010 constant dollars) by Field of Study, Canada



Source: Ostrovsky and Frenette (2014)

Although it was difficult to find work as a university graduate during the economic downturn in 2008-2009, university graduates fared better than high school graduates and, overall, university graduates were better protected from the risk of unemployment. For instance, the unemployment rate in Ontario amongst 25 to 29 year olds was over 12 percent for high school graduates, but below seven percent for university graduates (Hicks and Jonker, 2015). Further, 80 percent of university graduates who found work reported that they are in a position related to their field of study, though this differs according to program. For instance, engineering graduates report working in a job at least partially related to their field of study over 90 percent of the time between 2007 and 2010, while humanities graduates report this only slightly above 60 percent of the time between 2007 and 2010 (Hicks and Jonker, 2015). In addition, engineering graduates were more likely to attain full-time employment, with one percent accepting a part-time position. Humanities graduates reported part-time employment 14 percent of the time (Hicks and Jonker, 2015).

To measure the value of university education, the return on investment must include variables other than higher earnings and less unemployment. In this regard, Hicks and Jonker suggest that “the math still looks optimistic for a positive return for today’s graduates” (p. 5). Though this is not equally across faculties as humanities graduates have experienced modest returns on investment. For example, the return for males humanities graduates is a negative return. Female graduates from the humanities, however, have a return of 9.5%. On average men have a lower return on investment of 11.5% compared to females at 14.1%. The highest return for men is in health sciences, with a rate of 18.1% while women graduates from commerce have the highest return, with a rate of 19.3% (p.13).

Debt load is another factor affecting people’s decisions to go to university. From one perspective student debt is a positive sign that individuals are being granted access to university education, which they otherwise would not have had access to. That said, the definitive measurement of student debt is default rates. In Ontario, default rates have gone down after a spike in 2005, currently hovering at just below 5 percent as of 2010, while the Canadian average has significantly declined as of 2004 and sits, as of 2010, at just below 15 percent (Hicks and Jonker, 2015). Overall, these figures suggest that although student debt is rising, it is also becoming more manageable. Of course, given that humanities graduates earn less, have higher rates of unemployment, and work in jobs that are less likely to be related to their studies, graduates from humanities programs are likely to experience more difficulty in repaying their loans.

Overall, Hicks and Jonker from HEQCO has reviewed data surrounding the pertinent question of whether or not university studies are worth the investment. With this question in mind, the authors have demonstrated that university graduates are at an advantage in terms of employment premiums and employment stability, while most graduates experience positive returns on investments and debt load is becoming more manageable. However, it is important to note that the engineering, science, math and technology graduates experience a much greater advantage than humanities graduates, who, in a study of median cumulative earnings between 1991 and 2010, are more comparable to high school graduates than engineering graduates (Hicks and Jonker, 2015).

This report will be valuable information to anyone thinking about enrolling in a university program, especially young people who are facing this daunting question. As well, this report will be valuable to policy makers who need concrete evidence of the benefit of higher education to help bolster their proposals. This report will have limited value for people pursuing degrees at the Masters and Ph.D. levels, as the data presented in the council’s report did not include graduates from these types of programs. It would be interesting to see, for example, if humanities graduates from M.A. and Ph.D. programs fair better than their Bachelors degree counterparts in terms of finding a job related to their field of study, earning premium, and, especially for men (who experience a negative return on investment for humanities programs) to see whether they experience a positive return on investment at a higher level of education.

Full Report Available Here: <http://bit.ly/1NHfpA8>

Lind, C. (2013). What builds student's capacity in an alternative high school setting?

Journal of Educational Studies, 21:4, 4487-467

Reviewed by Albert Muhigi, Volunteer Researcher and Writer

This article explores a participatory research study conducted by Candace Lind from the Faculty of Nursing at the University of Calgary. Lind examines the role of student capacity building experiences at an alternative high school, which Lind considers a critical component of mental health, health promotion and educational experiences.

For this study a Canadian alternative high school setting was utilized due to the smaller school setting, class room sizes and emphasise on individual learning. Alternative high schools are designed for youths who flourish outside the traditional school setting. As the literature in this field indicates “building capacity of individuals or communities has been called a means to achieve health promotion and an end in itself, predicated on a foundation of community development and empowerment” (p.451).

Ultimately, this study's aim was to “identify and explore capacity-building situations and experiences in students to further an understanding of what promotes capacity development in adolescents.” To address this, the following five questions were included:

Based on the research questions, these are the findings Lind outlines:

1. What does capacity-building mean to students and staff?

Students need to go through experiential learning, learning their limitations, learning to take responsibility, risk taking in a safe environment, being treated with respect and developing self-confidence so as to nurture their emotional growth. For students to take part in school decisions it is important for their self-confidence since they believe they are worthy among their peers and staff (p.457).

2. What school experiences have students found to be capacity-building?

In order to improve on the students' capacity, they were encouraged to participate in school meetings where they had discussions and debates. The school also encouraged student-teacher relationships where the teachers were looked at as mentors, the students felt like they were cared about, supported and most importantly valued as human beings. The school also had the theme “freedom with responsibility” where students had the responsibility of setting their goals, choosing their courses and when to complete them. However, this freedom came with responsibility. The students lost the privilege of attending the school if they did not attend class or were not meeting the course requirements (p.459).

3. What student-teacher relationships promote capacity building?

Students were given the opportunity to set personal and academic goals with their teachers. The teachers were looked as mentors, they supported and cared for the students in their decision making. The teachers had to also ‘walk their talk’ as this would make the teachers more credible thus building trusting relationships with the students. The school also encouraged the use of a first name basis for both students and teachers so as to break artificial barriers and make the teachers more approachable which improved their relationships (p.460).

4. What role does a school democratic process play in student capacity building?

Including students' voices in school decision making when young could create a foundation for a more active role as an adult citizen in a democratic society. Participation in debates and discussions in school meetings developed students' real world skills such as negotiation skills, learning to respect the different opinions as strengths, critical thinking and leadership skills. Students also developed confidence through their public speaking as they engaged more in these school meetings (p.460).

5. What strategies do students and staff feel would be effective in promoting student capacity?

The most effective strategies would include opportunities for leadership, participation and responsibility as these were viewed as components for adulthood preparation (p.461). With involvement in school activities and decision making, the students feel comfortable in this setting which would translate into high academic achievement as they put their best foot forward.

Discussion.

Based on this research this alternative high school would be a good option for students to build their self-confidence and self-worth which would be instrumental in their adult hood. Involving students in school meetings, debates and discussions builds the students' capacity. The students engage with one another in a decision making setting which would in turn build their self-confidence, improve their critical thinking, improve their negotiation and leadership skills. These skills are instrumental in the real world as they would help them live or work with others from different backgrounds successfully.

The relationships between the teachers and students are also key because the teachers mentor them to achieve their personal and academic goals. Giving the students the freedom to choose their courses is also key as this will ensure the students prepare for the real world and take responsibility for the choices one makes.

The concept of an alternative high school, however, may not be adopted by those that believe in the traditional high school setting. Giving equal responsibility to students in decision making as teachers may be detrimental to the relationship between them. The students may lose respect for their teachers as they may look at them as their peers and not as mentors that could mould their personal or academic decisions. It should be noted that the themes used in this alternative high school can be adopted in the traditional high school but with a different approach leaving the adult staff in control of the school activities and still nurture the students to become model adult citizens.

In conclusion alternative high schools are viable as they shape students not only to set them up for academic excellence but also make them model adult citizens as they would transfer the skills they learnt in school to the real world. With these leadership qualities these students could be successful for years to come. This analogy was supported by the alumni who studied in the alternative high school in this study.

Full Report Available Here: <http://bit.ly/1MqFMEy>

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The Edmonton Social Planning Council provides leadership within the community by addressing and researching social issues, informing public discussion and influencing social policy.

Meet Sheida Azimi, ESPC Volunteer Researcher and Writer

Sheida Azimi was born and raised in Tehran, Iran. She earned her Bachelor's degree of Economics in Tehran. Her passion for social equality and social development facilitated her to move to Berlin where she pursued her masters degree in public policy.

During her graduate studies, Sheida touched upon several social policy related issues. She became extremely interested in social innovation and social entrepreneurship, while working on a project aiming to integrate individuals with intellectual disabilities into Kenyan society through a catering business.

Sheida completed her masters thesis on microfinance and women empowerment in Middle East, a subject closer to home. After her graduation, she left Berlin for Edmonton and started her participation with ESPC three weeks after.

Research Review Newsletter July 2015

The Edmonton Social Planning Council, in collaboration with our volunteers, strive to provide stakeholders and community members with up-to-date reviews on recently published social research reports.

Interested in volunteering for the ESPC or being added to our distribution list? Contact Manuel Escoto at manuele@edmontonsocialplanning.ca

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