



Shared Perspectives:

A Joint Publication on Preparing Students for the Workforce

Alberta Students' Executive Council
Canadian Alliance of Student Associations
College Student Alliance
New Brunswick Student Alliance
Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance
Students Nova Scotia
University of Prince Edward Island Student Union



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Message from the Partners.

Over the past two years, a partnership of provincial student associations has released joint publications to focus student perspectives on important issues in Canada's post-secondary education system. In 2017, *Shared Perspectives: A Joint Publication on Student Mental* provided a national review of challenges of student mental health care and last year, *Shared Perspectives: A Joint Publication on Campus Sexual Violence Prevention and Response* highlighted the importance of working together to end sexual violence on post-secondary campuses across Canada. Our partnership comes together again to discuss another important student issue in *Shared Perspectives: A Joint Publication on Preparing Students for the Workforce*.

Every day, our organizations think about how post-secondary education can continue to improve in Canada. We work to make sure all students can afford to pursue higher education, and how to prevent barriers to access. We care about the high-quality and innovative education we are receiving and are constantly looking for areas of growth. We think about how to incorporate the student voice into education, ensuring we also acknowledge that students must have a strong foundation of health and safety to be successful during their education.

Across the country, the topic of preparing students for the workforce continues to gain traction in many levels of government, post-secondary institutions, businesses, and community organizations. As this conversation evolves, it is important that student voices are prioritized and considered when making policy decisions. In this collaborative project, we hope to identify both challenges and opportunities that exist in individual provinces and explore policy recommendations that will ensure students are developing important skills during their post-secondary education and as they transition into the workforce.

This publication will present a collection of student perspectives from a variety of provinces and student associations across Canada. We hope this can be used to further the conversation on student employability, skills development, experiential learning opportunities, and how to best prepare students for the workforce.



Who We Are.

Alberta Students' Executive Council

The Alberta Students' Executive Council (ASEC) is a member driven provincial advocacy organization representing approximately 100,000 students from fifteen post-secondary institutions. Our member Students' Associations come from Colleges, to Technical Institutes, to Universities across Alberta studying trades and technology through baccalaureate programs. ASEC advocates for an affordable and accessible post-secondary education system and works to strengthen the role of local Students' Associations.

Canadian Alliance of Student Associations

CASA is a national voice for Canada's post-secondary students. Established in 1995, CASA is a non-partisan, not-for-profit student organization composed of student associations from across Canada. We represent undergraduate, graduate and polytechnic associations. At its core, CASA advocates on behalf of post-secondary students to the federal government. When Canada's leaders make decisions affecting our post-secondary education system, they turn to CASA for solutions.

College Student Alliance

College Student Alliance (CSA) is a non-profit, membership-driven advocacy organization representing the interests of Ontario's college students since 1974. Comprised of 12 student associations, CSA's objective is to ensure students receive affordable and quality education, uncompromising of accountability, transferability and accessibility. These efforts are to ensure that students have a successful college experience that facilitates a proper transition into their respective careers.

New Brunswick Student Alliance

The New Brunswick Student Alliance (NBSA) is the largest student organization in New Brunswick, representing over 12,000 post-secondary students across four member campuses. We advocate for a post-secondary education system where any qualified student can attain a high-quality education while enjoying an exceptional quality of life.

Who We Are.

Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance

The Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA) represents the interests of approximately 150,000 professional and undergraduate, full-time and part-time university students at eight student associations across Ontario. OUSA's approach to advocacy is based on creating substantive, student driven, and evidence-based policy recommendations. Our professional government relations practices ensure that we have the access to decision-makers we need in order for our members' voices to influence provincial legislation and policy.

Students Nova Scotia

Students Nova Scotia (StudentsNS) is an alliance of Nova Scotia post-secondary student associations, representing approximately 20,000 undergraduate, graduate, and college students across the province. We help set the direction of post-secondary education by consulting students, researching challenges, developing solutions, and bringing recommendations directly to government. We advocate for an affordable, accessible, and high-quality post-secondary education system that is directed by the student voice.

University of Prince Edward Island Student Union

The UPEI Student Union is a non-profit democratic representation of students. We are dedicated to fostering pride in the university, the betterment of university life, and enhancing the student experience at UPEI. We value our independence as an organization while maintaining effective relationships with the university and surrounding community.

Alberta Students' Executive Council

The Need for Skill Development and Youth Employment Programs in Alberta

By: Jon Mastel

Addressing Youth Unemployment and Skills Development

High youth unemployment has been an ongoing concern for both post-secondary students as well as governments since the downturn in the Canadian and Albertan economies. As the price for energy products produced in Alberta decreased many young adults found employment opportunities becoming scarce as business and corporate budgets became tight. Ensuring that young adults have both the skills for the job and the job itself should be an important focus of the government as the economic situation continues to improve in order to minimize potential long-term negative outcomes of their finances, health, and wellbeing.

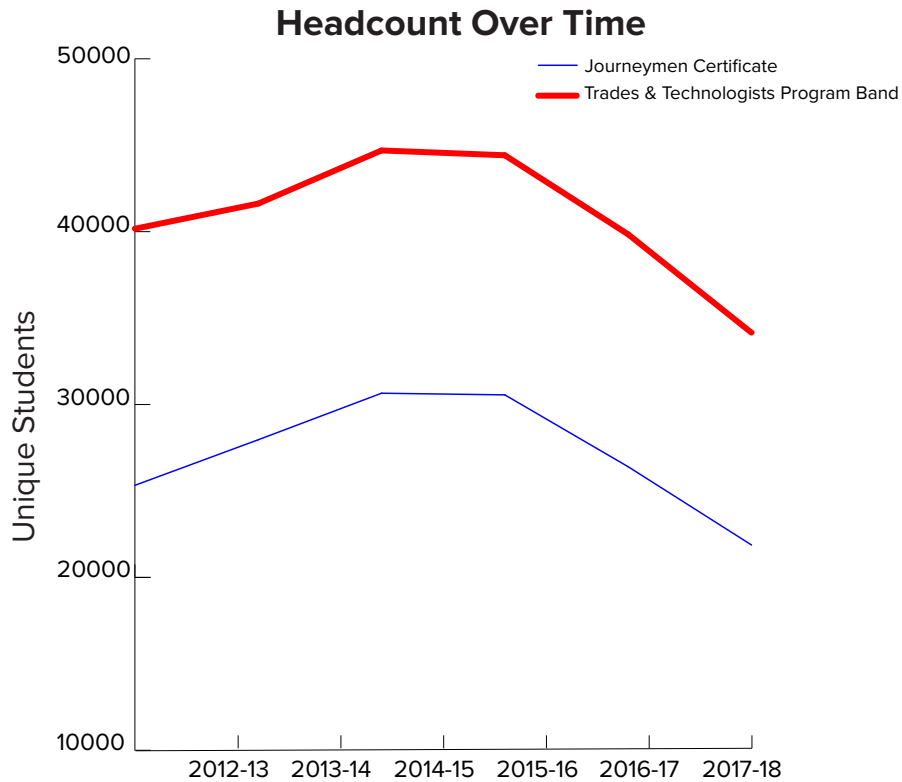
Unemployment early in an adult's career can have a greater impact on their mental health than unemployment later in their life. As young adults enter the workforce for the first time, they develop more of their own identity as they progress into adulthood.¹ Delayed development and socialization could strain an individual's psychobiological system leading to a greater need for mental health supports later in life.² While mental health supports are being increased and further supported by the government and society, proactive measures to prevent and minimize these negative influences

are likely to be more sustainable in the future when compared to the mental health programs that would be needed.

Further to potential long-term health impacts, early unemployment could impact the long term earning potential of the individual due to employer reactions, and a lack of skill development and advancement. It is a vicious cycle. The earlier you enter the workforce the greater the human capital investment returns are. Many employers are cautious when large gaps in employment and training appear on resumes and applications. This is often viewed as a signal of low productivity, low skills or other unappealing qualities hiring professionals try to avoid. In turn, this can lead to a degrade in the skills that go unused, as well as prevents further refining through active use. The strength of one's cognitive skills impact one's productivity and adaptability and from that the wage earned. Simply put, the degrade of unused skills decreases the wage one would earn when compared to one fresh from training. In an economic downturn where general unemployment increases, these impacts are felt most by those with the least skills and experience as higher skilled individuals take positions they are overqualified for.³

To ASEC, high youth unemployment is an early warning sign that action must be taken. Investing in post-secondary training, and in skill development, will help ensure long term success. While the economy continues to slowly improve, young Albertans remain on the sideline foregoing work experience and further education. Recent Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey data indicates that nearly 13% of Alberta youth aged 15-24 remain unemployed.⁴ Meanwhile, the Government of Alberta reports 68% of Albertans are transitioning into a post-

secondary program, including apprenticeships and trades, by the age 25.⁵ Alberta typically experiences low post-secondary participation rates – approximately 18% of 18-to-34-year-olds are enrolled in a post-secondary program. However the number of students enrolled in a journeyman certificate program, and in the Trades and Technology program band, has been decreasing substantially over the past few years.



Since the 2014-2015 academic year, enrollment in the Trades and Technologists program band has decreased by over 10,500 students, a decrease of 24% over three years, while Journeymen certificate programs lost approximately 8,750 students or a 29% decrease overall.⁶ ASEC finds these trends very concerning. While enrollment has increased in other programs, and at higher parchment levels such as baccalaureates, the number of unique students enrolled has marginally increased by a few hundred students over the same time frame.⁷ Due to an increase in international student enrollment, the total number of students in Alberta has remained predominantly stable. However, when only domestic students are counted, enrollment in Alberta post-secondary institutions has decreased by 2,720 since 2014-2015.⁸ While youth unemployment is high in

Alberta, enrollment in post-secondary education has decreased for domestic students with many also turning away from trades and technologist programs.

ASEC applauds the efforts by the Government of Alberta in preparing young adults for their future by investing in the Summer Temporary Employment Program, expanding some computer sciences and other technology-based programs, and ensuring tuition remains affordable, to name a few. These programs and initiatives have greatly benefited students enrolled in post-secondary programs to by helping them receive a high-quality education as well as gain the work experience to quickly enter the workforce. Even with these efforts, more work is needed to ensure young Albertans have the skills needed for the decades to come.

Canadian Alliance of Student Associations

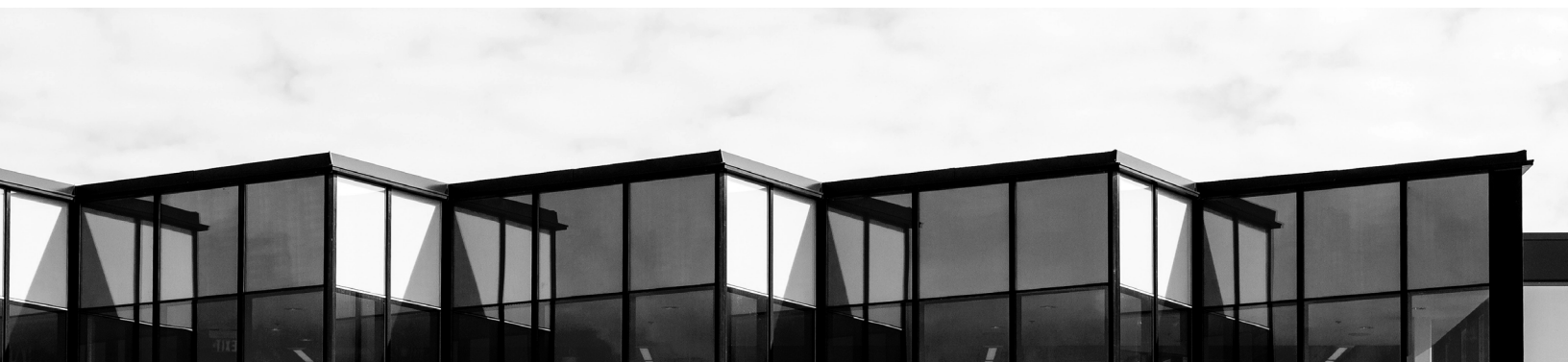
By: Jonathan Rix

The Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA) advocates for a post-secondary system that is affordable, accessible, innovative, and of the highest quality. A key aspect in supporting these principles is ensuring that Canadian post-secondary students across all academic disciplines feel prepared to handle the transition into the workforce, transforming their academic experiences into rewarding employment opportunities. CASA envisions a post-secondary system where any student who would like to participate in work-integrated learning has that opportunity. To support this vision, CASA, alongside the Business Higher Education Roundtable (BHER) and 25 other organizations across the country, is calling on the federal government to establish a strategy to ensure work-integrated learning is offered to 100% of post-secondary students.

Preparing students for the workforce is an integral part of a quality post-secondary education, and it is of the utmost importance to students. In a 2018 study conducted by Abacus Data and CASA, “creating good jobs for young Canadians” was the second highest priority for youth aged 18-29, second only to “making college and university more affordable.”⁹ These two points are interrelated, because providing students with paid work-integrated learning opportunities allows them to earn an income that helps to make their education more affordable. At the same time, post-secondary work-integrated learning opportunities provide students with essential

skills training which enhance their employment outcomes long-term and lead to higher earnings upon graduation. The Education Policy Research Initiative tax-linkage project connects student data to tax data and reports that students who participated in co-op programs earn on average roughly \$60,000 after graduation, while those who didn’t participate in co-op were earning on average roughly \$40,000. Wage disparities continue to grow over time, as eight years after the completion of their education, co-op graduates were making an average annual salary of \$100,000 compared to \$70,000 for those who did not take co-op.¹⁰ Since expanding work-integrated learning opportunities is a top priority among students and these experiences are proven to benefit students and the workforce, it should be a top priority for governments across the country.

In recent years, concerns regarding matters of youth unemployment and underemployment, skills development and training, and work-integrated learning have been a priority area for the federal government. While education is a provincial responsibility, the federal government has a role to play in 3 major areas: transfer payments to the provinces, research support, and human capital formation (student financial aid and youth employment). The human capital formation portion of federal responsibility is where skills and employment discussions manifest at the federal level. The Parliamentary Budget Office reported for the 2013-14 fiscal year that the federal government was spending \$2.1 billion on the Youth Employment Strategy



programming, such as Skills Link, Career Focus, and Canada Summer Jobs.¹¹ The emphasis on youth employment has only intensified since then. In the federal government's 2016 budget, the Canada Summer Jobs program was expanded by 35,000 positions, and 7,500 new co-op placements were made in STEM and business fields.¹² Following this, in Budget 2018, the government invested in the development of a digital platform meant to connect students with labour market information so they can make informed career decisions.¹³ In addition to recent investments, the federal government also convened an Expert Panel on Youth Employment that explored youth employment barriers and provided 13 recommendations to improve employment outcomes for young Canadians. The ban on unpaid internships in federally regulated sectors was also a positive step made by government to help protect young workers. Each of these actions were welcomed by CASA and are gradual steps propelling Canada towards the goal of making work-integrated learning available to 100% of students.

While CASA has welcomed these investments, there are still plenty of areas where improvement is necessary. The youth unemployment rate is noticeably higher for those from marginalized communities. In 2011, the youth unemployment rate was 22.6% for Indigenous youth, 16.9% for immigrants, 17.7% for visible minorities, and 25.9% for those with a disability, while the rate for youth overall sat at 14.1%.¹⁴ An emphasis on quality post-secondary education, and by extension, work-integrated learning, as an important social and economic equalizer needs to be considered in all policy decisions on youth employment going forward. While some students are able to successfully transition to the workforce, barriers continue to make it difficult for many. Youth underemployment also continues to be an issue. In recent years, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries have observed a phenomenon where young people who have the

qualifications to succeed in the workforce end up bouncing back and forth between temporary jobs and unemployment/inactivity, even in times of strong economic growth. There are a variety of potential causes for this, including challenging economic conditions that trap young people in entry level positions (such as the hourglass economy or labour market downturn), negative stereotypes about millennials, diversity barriers, and a disconnect between what is taught at educational institutions and what is needed in the labour market. The group of young people

who have difficulty integrating into the workforce for any or all of the above-mentioned reasons are often referred to as PINEs, or the poorly-integrated new entrants.¹⁵ Investing in work-integrated learning opportunities for all students would help lower the unemployment rate among youth from marginalized communities.

CASA supports the call to create a 100% work-integrated learning strategy brought forward by the BHER. CASA believes that any qualified student who wishes to participate in a work-integrated learning program should be able to. That being said, this goal cannot be achieved today, or perhaps

even this year. This type of investment in the student experience will take time and must be conducted with strategic steps. What can be done in 2019? The federal government should start by expanding the Student Work-Integrated Learning program to include opportunities for students in humanities, arts, social sciences, and education fields. The program is currently limited to students participating in STEM fields. Additionally, the Canada Summer Jobs program should be expanded to provide students with employment opportunities during their study period between September and April. Both of these actions would move the needle closer to offering 100% of students in Canada a valuable work-integrated learning experience, and as a result, a higher quality and more affordable post-secondary education.

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College Student Alliance

By: Olivia Dagbo

Introduction

In May 1965, then Ontario Minister of Education Bill Davis introduced Bill 153, recognising a post-secondary system separate from universities that fostered career preparation and skills development.¹⁶ Through this system, students would be equipped with relevant training to support local and provincial economies. More than 50 years later, thousands of programs and experiential opportunities in health, sciences, business and arts provide college students with the technical and academic acumen to excel in the workforce. As intended, more than 500,000 students now attend one of Ontario's 24 colleges, primarily, to gain skills in preparation of their future careers.¹⁷

Importance of WIL

One of the most commonly advised ways for students to prepare for their future careers is by gaining employment experience while in school. Through a work-integrated learning (WIL) experience, students receive employment training and skills development while completing their academic credentials. Facilitated through academic institutions or through businesses themselves, students participating in WIL

opportunities are provided with a window into prospective careers, though not all are provided compensation.

WIL opportunities support employability as well as personal and professional growth through career mobility and confidence.¹⁸ For example, according to 2015 National Apprenticeship Survey, students that completed their apprenticeship program had an annual income of \$69,512 compared to \$59,782 for those who did not.¹⁹ For soon-to-be graduates who are having difficulty articulating their newly-acquired skills,²⁰ WIL may be able to translate work experiences into career confidence:

“For both college and university respondents, employed graduates who participated in WIL were more likely to feel that they were appropriately qualified for their job, that their job was related to their long-term career goals and that their job was related to their studies.”²¹

Skills development, career mobility, and confidence is partly why the federal and provincial governments invested in the improvement and development of WIL opportunities. Bill 64, or the *Protecting Interns and Creating a Learning Economy Act*, was introduced by NDP MPP Peggy Sattler to advise the government of ways to protect students from unfair policies and procedures that were a detriment to student WIL positions.²² In response to provincial efforts and CSA's advocacy, then-Premier Kathleen Wynne developed the Highly Skilled Workforce Expert Panel to

inform recommendations on educational and economic training systems.^{23,24} A few years later, the provincial government further invested nearly \$190 million over 3 years to support Ontario's Career Kick-Start Strategy and the development of 40,000 new work-related learning experiences.²⁵

Areas of Improvement

Access - Despite provincial advancements to improve WIL, several challenges remain. WIL programs are highly desired but are not entirely accessible. For example, co-op programs have additional program fees and may be longer in duration in comparison to non-WIL programs, incurring additional costs for students. Considering the provincial government's proposed changes to increase student contributions to OSAP as well as implement a minimum 10% loan for all OSAP applicants, low-income students may be subject to unforeseen financial burdens to enrol or complete their program. With more than a quarter of college applicants gaining a household income of less than \$30,000,²⁶ the proposed provincial policies could restrict program access for many college students in Ontario.

Financial compensation - Once students are enrolled in their respective programs, there is a possibility that students may not receive financial compensation during their WIL experience. Some college students have to satisfy hours of unpaid placement to receive necessary credentials, while working other jobs to pay for personal and academic expenses. Low-income students are particularly disadvantaged as financial obligations may hinder participation from low paying or unpaid opportunities. As a result, many compromise their WIL experience to address their current needs. To increase access, all WIL opportunities should be paid; ensuring adequate compensation is imperative to addressing equity in career training and development. Expanding and promoting wage-subsidy programs for small- and medium-sized enterprises to engage in paid WIL opportunities can diversify opportunities for students and ensure their focus remains on their career aspirations.

Cohesive terminology - The language concerning WIL is complex; there are various

forms of WIL, and only some of them are eligible for funding. Both students and business are unsure of the stipulations and expectations surrounding each terminology.²⁷ Clarification for students and employers on the different types of WIL and funding streams can increase both student and business participation through the allocation of applicable grants, which can diversify the student opportunities and employment access. The province should provide transparent information and consistent terminology for students and employers to make informed decisions. In addition, simplifying and streamlining the application process for apprenticeship programs can limit procedural confusion.

Student equity - Some businesses are not equipped with proper equipment or procedures to support students with differing abilities, limiting options available. Students may also be hesitant in explaining their required accommodations to their employers. International students, women, and marginalized students also face systemic and social barriers in accessing apprenticeships and WIL opportunities. Measures to ensure proper facilitation between student needs and rights, as well as employer expectations are required; adequate funding for WIL can support training and integration measures in small and larger colleges across Ontario.

Conclusion

Work-integrated learning is incredibly beneficial for both employers and students. Despite this, there are various areas of improvement needed to support students' success and access. Proper investments, cohesiveness, and equity can help make WIL much more effective and accessible for Ontario students. With proper investment today, college students hold the ability to create a more productive tomorrow.

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New Brunswick Student Alliance

By: Emily Blue and Brianna Workman

Introduction

The New Brunswick Student Alliance's (NBSA) 2017-2018 Advocacy Week highlighted many key student issues in the post-secondary sector. Central to the issues addressed in the Alliance's Advocacy Document, [Mandating a Better New Brunswick](#), was increasing access to experiential learning opportunities for all students in the province. Of course, the difficulty the post-secondary sector faces in properly preparing students to enter the workforce post-graduation is consistent and pressing across Canada. New Brunswick is no exception. In fact, the province's particular demographic challenges and the commonality of youth out-migration, in many ways may have demanded that the province respond and craft creative policy solutions to these issues.

In response, the province struck an Experiential Learning Task Force in 2016. This Task Force brought together a variety of key stakeholders on this file - including student organisations, universities, government and employers from different sectors. The creation of the Task Force represented a concrete outlet to chart the path forward for experiential learning in the province. The Task Force worked to gather reports, piece together information about experiential learning in the province, and compile a series of recommendations for future development. Once the Task Force had completed its work, it was developed into an Experiential Learning Steering Committee, which was responsible for integrating experiential learning into the post-secondary field and implementing the recommendations of the Task Force.

Furthermore, several working groups which

stemmed from the Steering Committee worked to tackle various individual aspects of experiential learning. This included developing a student funding model, faculty incentives for increasing experiential learning in their classrooms, metrics for measuring success, determining how funding would be distributed among the universities, what represented an experiential learning opportunity, and much more.

For an inherently student-driven organization like the NBSA, our place on the Task Force (and subsequent Steering Committee), was the perfect outlet to ensure that students were kept at the heart of an ongoing conversation that was fundamentally about the student experience. Furthermore, working regularly with key players on this file on both the Steering Committee and its working groups allowed the NBSA to make recommendations and create inherently student-

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centric policies and programs surrounding work-integrated-learning in New Brunswick.

Progress to Date

During its 2017-2018 Advocacy Week, the Alliance advocated for the development of a \$2 million experiential learning fund to help remove various financial barriers students face when engaging with experiential learning opportunities. This fund sought to alleviate a wide range of these barriers – from providing wage subsidies to compensation for necessary travel, equipment or accommodations. Consequently, the NBSA's proposed experiential learning fund was aimed at being a concrete step towards the Alliance's long-term goal of ensuring that every student in the province has access to at least one experiential opportunity during their studies.²⁸

Furthermore, the fund was aimed at filling a specific gap in existing experiential learning programming by focusing on the provision of paid work-integrated-learning opportunities to students in fields of study that do not traditionally have these hands-on experiences ingrained into their programs. Also, accounting for the academic breakdown in New Brunswick's public university sector, which leans heavily on the liberal arts and social sciences, it was important that tailored experiential learning opportunities be tailored for students outside of the Sciences, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields.²⁹

With the support of other key stakeholders on the Steering Committee, the NBSA successfully advocated for the establishment of the proposed experiential learning fund last year. In addition, the years of subsequent NBSA contributions to the Steering Committee ultimately led to the development of not only the Alliance's proposed experiential learning fund, but a fully funded suite of new experiential learning programming.

On June 14, 2018 the Government of New Brunswick announced its investment of \$18.4 million into experiential learning. Of this overall amount, \$15 million was allocated directly

towards student funding. Funded at \$1.5 million a year, this announcement finalized the creation of the Student Experiential Learning Fund (SELF), which came directly from the NBSA's recommendations. This targeted funding for experiential learning was made available to post-secondary students for the first time in the fall of 2018.³⁰

This funding allows for students to have paid work-integrated-learning opportunities with non-profits and small to medium enterprises (SMEs), which can be subsidized up to 100%, and with larger businesses, which qualify for a subsidisation of up to 50% of the students' wages. In addition to providing wage subsidies for work-integrated-learning, the SELF also has the ability to cover the various other costs that students may encounter while pursuing an opportunity. This could include covering the expenses of a bus pass, parking pass, equipment, or training. As a result, the SELF is now minimizing the various financial barriers that students face while gaining valuable experience within New Brunswick.

Additionally, as proposed, the SELF prefers the creation of opportunities for students studying in fields that do not traditionally have an experiential learning component included in their programs, such as students in the liberal arts.

In addition, the SELF allocates \$5 million per year toward funding Indigenous students. Similar to the application of the SELF, this fund supports work-integrated-learning opportunities for Indigenous students while also funding projected-based submissions from Indigenous learners. Lastly, this student funding model provides automatic \$1500 bursaries for those students in mandatory work-placements such as in nursing, education, and social work.³¹

Finally, the overall investment strived to increase the institutional capacities of the universities, which are largely responsible for the administration of these programs. This included increasing staff capacity on all campuses and funding for the introduction of a province-wide

online platform for experiential learning. This platform will allow students to track and record experiential learning opportunities throughout their education while also serving as a tool to connect students and employers. As a result, students graduate with an official record of their learning experiences outside of the classroom, which have helped to shape their overall educational experience.

Conclusion

Even though these programs are still new, the initial response has been an overwhelmingly positive one from employers, universities, and students alike. This means that New Brunswick has surely taken an exceptionally positive step towards increasing and supporting tangible, hands-on, and meaningful opportunities for New Brunswick's post-secondary students. And this is certainly something to celebrate as we continue to strive forward.

Because the progress on this file is a marked achievement for the Alliance and a clear demonstration of the positive effects of placing students at the centre of the policymaking process, the NBSA will be publishing a report

on *Experiential Learning in New Brunswick*. This report will provide a complete account of the history, progress, and potential next steps for the future of experiential learning in New Brunswick.³²

Despite this great success, the work on experiential learning is far from complete. With over 120,000 jobs becoming available due to the aging workforce over the next ten years, there will still be a pressing need for the Government of New Brunswick to respond to this need by facilitating the smooth transition of recent graduates into the workforce.

However, as the Alliance has always firmly held, the early success of these new experiential learning programs demonstrates another clear example of how investing in post-secondary students is the best investment any government can make to ensure the future prosperity of New Brunswick.



Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance

By: Eddy Avila and Shannon Kelly

Introduction: Preparing Ontario Students for the Workforce

As technology advances and a new generation of intelligent graduates emerges, the conversation around preparing students for the workforce continues to evolve. According to the Council of Ontario Universities, Ontarians want students graduating post-secondary education to be flexible and have adaptable skills, including critical thinking, communication, and teamwork.³³ More Ontarians are expecting post-secondary education to provide experiential learning experiences and opportunities for skills development, a shift from traditional education of only discipline-specific knowledge. Students have also identified wanting more opportunities to develop “real-world” skills. Many students report feeling more confident in their future job prospects after participating in experiential learning opportunities throughout their post-secondary education.³⁴

OUSA's 2017 Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey (OPSSS) showed that 86% of respondents said that their experience with work-integrated learning opportunities, like an internship, community or co-op placement, had improved their educational experience. However, of OPSSS respondents, only 33% of students said they had participated in a work-integrated learning experience.³⁵ Institutions, governments, and stakeholders in the post-secondary sector need to address this increased demand for more experiential learning opportunities for students to ensure that graduates are ready to transition into the workforce.

Over the years, OUSA has prioritized experiential learning opportunities for students as a way to develop skills and ensure that graduates are ready for the challenges after post-secondary education. OUSA has played a critical role in showing the Ontario government the importance of access to experiential learning opportunities for all willing and qualified university students. In 2016, in part due to OUSA's advocacy,



“While co-op remains a prominent form of experiential learning in Ontario, other forms of experiential learning are arising, giving students similar hands-on experience while improving the quality of their post-secondary education.”

Premier Kathleen Wynne tasked the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Development to establish an Expert Panel on building a Highly Skilled Workforce in Ontario.³⁶ This group, which would later be called “The Premier’s Highly Skilled Workforce Expert Panel,” brought together experts in the areas of employment, labour, education, post-secondary education, training agencies, and community organizations to discuss the nature of the changing workplace and provide the solutions to building a skilled workforce. Of the 28 recommendations the Expert Panel released, one recommendation called on the provincial government to commit to providing every student with at least one experiential learning opportunity during secondary school and at least one experiential learning opportunity by the end of their post-secondary education.³⁷ The Premier’s Highly Skilled Workforce Expert Panel in 2016 is an example of Ontario’s increasing desire to build a workforce that is adaptable and ready for the challenges of the future.

Experiential Learning in Ontario: More Than Just Co-Ops

Experiential learning, a term that refers to learning through reflection on doing, has become an increasingly recognized term in Ontario’s post-secondary education landscape. One of the most commonly understood examples of experiential learning is co-operative (co-op) education. Co-op programs have proved themselves as an extremely effective form of experiential learning. Students who pursued co-op programs during their university education have been shown to earn a higher salary after graduation than those who did not pursue co-op.³⁸ These students are

not only able to gather hands-on experience, but are also able to explore different career paths that help inform students’ decision-making on important career and education decisions.³⁹ While co-op remains a prominent form of experiential learning in Ontario, other forms of experiential learning are arising, giving students similar hands-on experience while improving the quality of their post-secondary education. Community Service Learning (CSL) is a form of experiential learning that integrates sending students into the community as a part of a course.⁴⁰ Community Based Learning (CBL) is a type of learning in which community partners are brought into the classroom to present authentic problems, questions or areas of interest for students to present solutions to.⁴¹ According to the Canadian Alliance for Community Service Learning, 16 institutions in Ontario participate in CSL and community engagement programs.⁴²

CSL and CBL courses not only give students unique and impactful learning opportunities, but also contribute to the greater community, making it an extremely beneficial practice. One study showed that 95% of students who took a CSL course reported these courses helped them develop employability skills, networks, and improved their overall social development.⁴³ In addition to this, approximately two thirds of students reported that these opportunities improved their ability to work effectively with others and respond to complex real life situations.⁴⁴ Overall, CSL and CBL have been shown to enhance students’ self-knowledge and aid in career development.⁴⁵



Areas of Improvement

While CSL and CBL have proven to be successful means of experiential learning, barriers to creating and pursuing these courses exist. Students who have taken CSL or CBL courses have reported finding the goals of the course, grading standards, and workload unclear.⁴⁶ Course instructors also noted that CSL and CBL courses require a greater level of coordination and face concerns surrounding loss of control of the course when engaging community partners.⁴⁷ CSL and CBL, while effective means of learning, are still fairly new to universities, which limits the resources available to instructors interested in pursuing them.

OUSA recommends that the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities provide faculty incentives to develop meaningful community-service learning courses. These incentives could take the form of financial bonuses for the additional time and effort needed to coordinate these courses or credit for professors pursuing tenure.

OUSA also recommends that the Council of Ontario Universities, Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, and Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations create a best practice system for administering CSL and CBL courses. These best practices should include supports for building relationships with community-based partners and guidelines on how to improve teaching methods to support community-based partnerships.

Conclusion: Keeping Ontario Open for Business

In Ontario, students are now adapting to a newly-elected Conservative government after 15 years of a Liberal government. This Conservative government has prioritized job creation, and Premier Doug Ford has a mandate to make Ontario “Open for Business”. Students in Ontario have been active partners in advancing the conversation on better preparing students for the workforce, and they will continue this advocacy with the new government. OUSA will continue to highlight the importance of experiential learning opportunities as a way for students to develop the skills necessary to meet the demands of future employers after graduation.

Ontario needs to continue to adapt to the changing workforce of tomorrow. That means there needs to be ongoing commitments from students, post-secondary institutions, employers, and the government to support students transitioning out of university and into the workforce. Ontario should continue to expand experiential learning opportunities and explore innovative types of experiential learning like community-service learning and community-based learning.

Students are hopeful that this government will acknowledge the importance of preparing students with the skills they need to succeed after graduating. After all, you can’t keep Ontario “Open for Business” without an adaptable, highly-skilled workforce.

Students Nova Scotia

By: Tristan Bray
Editor: Clancy McDaniel

Introduction: Contextualizing Student & Youth Employment in Nova Scotia

Conversations with students at campuses across Nova Scotia reveal that one of the primary motivators for attending post-secondary education is to pursue jobs and careers. Students hope that their education will provide them with the skills and experiences needed in order to find meaningful work. These conversations are reinforced by the findings of the Canadian University Survey Consortium's 2016 First-Year University Student Survey, which had over 63% of first year students rank improving their career and job prospects as the most important reason for attending university.⁴⁸ For student associations, this means that student employment has been continually prioritized in conversations with administrators and government.

For Nova Scotia post-secondary students, administrators, and government, the challenges surrounding student employment are acutely related to provincial youth retention. Our students, particularly the many out-of-province and international students, are widely regarded as the province's future. With an aging population and years of slow population decline, it is no surprise that the province has sought to reduce youth out-migration, retain more high-skilled workers, and encourage more young people to settle in Nova Scotia. The 2014 report of the Nova Scotia Commission on Building Our New Economy, aptly titled "Now Or Never: An Urgent Call to Action for Nova Scotians" highlighted these issues by developing three goals related to post-secondary students. These goals are the retention of 10% of our international students post-graduation, maintaining our youth employment rate at or above the national average, and increasing Nova Scotia's post-

“Our students, particularly the many out-of-province and international students, are widely regarded as the province’s future.”

secondary attainment rate from 65% to 75%.⁴⁹ The group One Nova Scotia, which emerged from the commission, has been tracking the progress of these goals. They report that all three goals related to post-secondary education are “progressing” towards meeting their targets.⁵⁰ In addition to this success, the province reports that for the past three years, more youth have moved to the province than have left.⁵¹ Despite this positive progress, Nova Scotia's youth unemployment rate is 16.9%, more than double the adult unemployment rate of 5.9%.⁵² StudentsNS believes that more needs to be done to improve both experiential learning opportunities and youth retention in Nova Scotia.

Progress to Date: Current Programs

The province's approach to experiential learning and student employment has been narrowly focused on programs that directly connect and fund job opportunities for students. The Department of Labour and Advanced Education (LAE) oversees four of these programs: the Co-operative Education Incentive (CO-OP), the Student Summer Skill Incentive (SKILL),



Graduate to Opportunity (GTO), and Innovate to Opportunity (ITO). Each of these programs directly subsidizes student and recent graduate employment opportunities; however, they are targeted towards slightly different demographics. The CO-OP and SKILL programs provide employment opportunities for students during their studies, while the GTO and ITO programs offer opportunities for recent graduates.

The CO-OP program provides a \$7.50/hour wage subsidy to employers that offer career-related work experiences for post-secondary students in co-operative education. Employers must pay \$15.00/hour and offer full-time employment for the student. The program prioritizes the quality and relevance of the work experience for students, and funded positions are vetted by both the department and co-op offices at post-secondary institutions. Funding through CO-OP is available in the fall, winter, and summer semesters. The SKILL program provides an \$8.85/hour wage subsidy to nonprofit and charity organizations that hire students over the summer. The student must be attending or returning to post-secondary in the fall and the employer must pay \$11/hour. These programs offer direct experiential learning opportunities to students by providing paid employment opportunities.

The GTO program allows small businesses, start-up companies, and non-profits to hire a recent graduate for a full-time position by subsidizing a portion of the salary. Employers must pay the recent graduate more than \$30,000/year, and in return receive funding for 25% of the first year and 12.5% of the second year salary. It includes a diversity bonus of 10% additional funding if the recent graduate is a member of a marginalized group. The ITO program functions

similarly; however, it allows small and medium sized businesses to hire recent graduates from graduate programs into research-focused roles. Stipulations include that employers must pay a minimum of \$60,000/year, the position must spend a certain amount of time on innovation-related activities, and the employer receives a salary subsidy of 35%/50% for the first year, 20%/25% for the second year, and 12.5% for the third year, depending on the position details. These programs are aimed at retaining the province's young and highly-educated graduates.

Areas for Improvement: Policy Recommendations

One of the core values of StudentsNS is quality. We believe that policies, programs, and services in post-secondary education should exceed student expectations and help prepare them for careers and success post-graduation. Experiential learning during post-secondary education is directly related to meaningful employment post-graduation. The most effective experiential learning occurs through student employment programs, as they provide students with paid work experience during their degree. Students with paid work experience are more than twice as likely to find work post-graduation than students with no experience or with unpaid experience.⁵³ Over the past few years, we have made a number of specific policy recommendations to improve LAE's student employment programs. CO-OP is one of the most direct and successful methods of experiential learning for students - however, there is currently more demand for the incentive than funding available, both from students and employers. In order to help more

students gain work experience during their studies, the annual funding for CO-OP should be increased from \$2.3 million to \$3.3 million. This would create approximately 250 more positions for students throughout the year and address the backlog of employers applying for funding. The SKILL program could be improved by widening the employer eligibility from only nonprofits and charities to include small businesses, thus offering more opportunities for students to gain meaningful work experience through the program. Both the CO-OP and SKILL programs should include a diversity incentive, as the most common recurring barrier we hear from co-op offices at post-secondary institutions is that students from traditionally marginalized backgrounds struggle to secure work placements. A diversity incentive for both programs could reward employers for hiring students from under-represented groups by increasing the wage subsidy by \$1/hour. While these specific recommendations would improve the existing student employment programs, the challenges of student employment and youth retention requires a broader approach.

Conclusion: Taking a Broader Approach

From a wider perspective, it's concerning that the province's approach to student employment has been mainly focused on providing directly subsidized positions for students. While these positions provide incredible experience and are

very valuable, few students are able to participate due to limited funding and the small number of positions. We must acknowledge that the challenges surrounding student employment are shared by students, post-secondary institutions, businesses, and government. A collective effort is needed to drastically improve student employment and youth retention in the province. The province should bring together a task force of students, post-secondary institutions, and business leaders to examine the system-wide challenges to student employment, and commit to increased funding and improving existing student employment programs. Businesses should demonstrate leadership by hiring more students and recent graduates. Finally, post-secondary institutions should improve and expand experiential learning opportunities on our campuses so that more students can participate.

StudentsNS will continue to advocate to improve experiential learning opportunities available for students and to advance a system-wide, concerted effort to improve both student employment and youth retention in Nova Scotia.

“We must acknowledge that the challenges surrounding student employment are shared by students, post-secondary institutions, businesses, and government.”



University of Prince Edward Island Student Union

Students in Prince Edward Island, like those in other provinces, are concerned with employment opportunities post-graduation. Youth out-migration is a common characteristic in Atlantic Canada, and this can be in part attributed to lack of employment opportunities. In 2017, 3941 people emigrated from PEI to other areas in Canada, for a net interprovincial loss of 446 persons.⁵⁴

Historically, PEI has had a slightly higher unemployment rate than the rest of Canada. In 2000, the national unemployment rate was 6.8%, whereas PEI had an unemployment rate of 12% and a youth unemployment rate of 14.6%.⁵⁵ In September 2018, PEI's youth unemployment rate stood at 10.7%, slightly lower than the national youth unemployment rate of 11%, but above PEI's average unemployment rate of 8.7%.⁵⁶ Although PEI's youth unemployment is slightly lower, the areas of growth in youth employment have been predominantly in the Accommodation & Food Services.⁵⁷ In saying this, PEI currently has one of the lowest minimum wages in Canada, with an hourly wage of \$11.55.⁵⁸

The twenty-first century economy has required students to attend post-secondary education

at a higher rate than ever before. Students are accumulating student debt at record rates, while simultaneously facing discrimination in the labour market. This situation is no different for students in PEI. Experiential Learning is one way that can better connect students with employment opportunities. This can be described as education through experiences that support students in applying their knowledge and conceptual understanding to real-world problems and situations. The classroom can be a space where experiential learning takes place, but when students leave the classroom for opportunities such as internships, co-op placements, clinical experiences, research, and service-learning projects, the learning becomes more powerful. In addition to this, exposing students to these opportunities will help create a more skilled and ready workforce, and will make students more employable.

In Canada and the United States, there has been research on the positive impacts of experiential learning translating into employment opportunities for students. In the US, according to the National Association of Colleges and Employers, only 37% of unpaid interns receive a job offer following their Bachelor's degree,

“The classroom can be a space where experiential learning takes place, but when students leave the classroom for opportunities such as internships, co-op placements, clinical experiences, research, and service-learning projects, the learning becomes more powerful.”



compared to 63% of paid interns.⁵⁹

Since 2016, the UPEI Student Union has advocated to the provincial government of PEI on the importance of experiential learning, and for increased investments to further develop experiential learning opportunities accessible to students. The UPEISU also sits on the PEI Experiential Learning Steering Committee, a group comprised of students, government, institutions, and public and private sector representation. The Steering Committee gathers to discuss recommendations on ways to further develop experiential learning in different areas across PEI. In Spring 2017, Experiential Learning was determined as one of the main policy priorities, as chosen by students, for the 2018-2019 UPEISU provincial lobby document.

In the UPEISU's Experiential Learning policy, recommendations include investing into an Experiential Learning Fund, with the purpose of creating more experiential learning opportunities such as internships and research.⁶⁰ Furthermore, the UPEISU has recommended that these opportunities be made accessible for all faculties, not just programs that would traditionally have access, such as Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), but expanded to Business, Humanities, Arts, Social Sciences, and Education (BHASE).⁶¹ Additionally, UPEISU has recommended that the Province of PEI create protections against unpaid internships, citing successful models in Ontario, with their six point system.⁶² Lastly, UPEISU recommended that similar to Quebec, the provincial government should implement a provincial training tax to incentivize the private sector to contribute in the training of the workforce.⁶³

Other areas in Atlantic Canada, with similar characteristics to PEI, have been

greatly successful with investments and the development of experiential learning opportunities made available for students of all faculties. With representatives from the New Brunswick Student Alliance, Government of New Brunswick, all publically-funded universities, and private and non-profit business sectors, the New Brunswick Experiential Learning Steering Committee (ELSC) successfully collaborated to ensure the development of experiential learning in New Brunswick.⁶⁴ In Spring 2018, taking into consideration the work of the ELSC, the New Brunswick government announced a 15 million dollar investment over three years, including the establishment of the Student Experiential Learning Fund, and a dedicated 3.5 million dollars to non-traditional experiential learning fields such as BHASE.⁶⁵ The UPEISU applauds the work of the New Brunswick ELSC and the considerable investments made by the Government of New Brunswick, and believes that a similar program could be replicable in PEI.

Experiential Learning has a positive impact on not only employment opportunities post-graduation, but also amplifies the learning experience during a student's time in post-secondary education. Experiential learning is something that the UPEISU values, has advocated for in the past number of years, and believes should be expanded so that all students and faculties can reap the positive impact it brings to education and employment. New Brunswick has set a great example of investing into student's learning experience via the Student Experiential Learning Fund, and the UPEISU believes that leadership like this should be taken across Canada. Experiential Learning not only benefits students in PEI, but but students in all provinces ranging from east to west.

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Suggested Citation(s):

Eddy Avila, et al. *Shared Perspectives: A Joint Publication on Preparing Students for the Workforce*. April 2019, Canada.

Eddy Avila, Tristan Bray, Emily Blue, Olivia Dagbo, Shannon Kelly, Jon Mastel, Clancy McDaniel, Jonathan Rix and Brianna Workman. *Shared Perspectives: A Joint Publication on Preparing Students for the Workforce*. April 2019, Canada.

Publication Design by:
Deborah Lam