

Nice Work (If You Can Get It): University Student Employment and Labour Market Experience in Summer 2011

Canadian Education Project Insight Brief #2

Edyta Kaznowska
Alex Usher

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CANADIAN EDUCATION PROJECT



Canadian Education Project is an initiative of Higher Education Strategy Associates. Its mission is to improve public policy in education through research, program evaluation, public consultations and knowledge mobilization. Our staff and scholars combine unrivalled knowledge of education and training in Canada with extensive expertise in social science research techniques, enabling us to provide a broad range of informational, analytical, advisory and policy-related services to a diverse array of clients.

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Contact:

Canadian Education Project
460 Richmond St. West, Suite 400
Toronto, Canada, M5V1Y1
phone: 416.848.0215
fax: 416.849.0500
info@canedproject.ca
twitter: @canedproject

ekaznowska@higheredstrategy.ca
ausher@higheredstrategy.ca

www.canedproject.ca

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INTRODUCTION

Though there has been a considerable amount of research conducted into the student condition in Canada over the past decade, what happens during the summer months has received remarkably little attention. Yet this is actually a key time for students; it is the period where they have the greatest contact with the labour market, which is important both for short-term earnings and savings and for long-term preference formation and skill development in the labour market.

In order to fill this data void, Higher Education Strategy Associates' (HESA) Canadian Education Project began an annual survey of university students to explore precisely these issues. This document is our second research report on students' summer activities in Canada. Last summer, we published *Canadian University Students in the Summer of 2010: Wages and Employment*. This was the first significant attempt in Canada to go beyond Statistics Canada's fairly cursory glances at student summer employment rate by looking at wages earned, employment by industry, and how students combined work and school. It was also the first report to make use of HESA's CanEd Student Research Panel – a group of several thousand students who are surveyed every few weeks on education-related issues.

This year, our report shines a light on the issue of winners and losers in this year's slowly improving summer labour market. Specifically, it asks how broadly employment and wage gains are being shared. The answer appears to be that to a significant degree, this summer's labour market is a two-speed one: red-hot for certain technical and scientific disciplines, and distinctly tepid for everyone else. As a result, much of this paper is focussed on the issue of students' field of study and how that affects summer labour market returns.

Section 1 of this paper provides a brief description of our survey sample. Section 2 looks specifically at employment, unemployment and participation rates, as well as at how difficult students feel their job search was compared to that in 2010. Section 3 looks at hours worked and wages earned as well as the number of jobs held. Section 4 looks at the never-before examined issue of the relationship between field of study and the degree to which it is related to students' summer jobs. Section 5 looks at students' desires to take on more work, while Section 6 looks at the reasons behind students' unemployment or non-participation in the labour market. Section 7 provides an interesting look at students' attendance at summer courses (an area not covered by Statistics Canada data). Finally, Section 8 provides a brief summary and conclusion to the entire document.

SAMPLE DESCRIPTION AND METHODOLOGY

The data in this report were collected during an online survey conducted by Higher Education Strategy Associates' Canadian Education Project between June 20th and 30th, 2011. HESA runs an on-going online panel with a membership of over 8,000 undergraduate students who have been enrolled in an undergraduate program in a Canadian degree-granting institution at some point in the 2010-11 academic year and have indicated that they are returning for study in 2011-12. Roughly every six weeks, HESA sends them a survey on a variety of issues, with a response rate that varies from month to month, usually in the range of 25% to 40%. The sample for this study is 2,866 cases.

Obviously, the resulting sample for any of these monthly surveys is not a purely random one, as members of the panel must have responded to at least one previous survey administered by Higher Education Strategy Associates (either directly or as part of its Canadian Education Project). Since they are not based on random probability samples, the concept of "margin of sampling error" is not applicable to results shown here.

As with most student surveys, females are slightly over-sampled, as they appear to be likelier to respond to surveys than males. Our panel is also slightly overweight in Ontario and underweight in Quebec (specifically, it is underweight at Francophone universities, meaning it is a highly Montreal- and Anglo-centred sample). It is also biased towards upper-year students. Exact numbers in the sample change from month to month; up-to-date details of the survey demographics are available on request by contacting the authors.

LABOUR MARKET PARTICIPATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Our survey found that the summer 2011 Labour Market Participation – that is, students who had worked, students who had looked for work and were unable to find it, and students who were planning to look for work – was 84.6%. The employment rate – that is, the percentage of all students that had found employment – was 70.9%. This implies a summer unemployment rate of 16.2%

However, there were significant differences in participation and employment across a range of demographic factors. For instance, women’s participation rate exceeds men’s by almost four percentage points and their employment rate exceeds men’s by almost seven percentage points. Rates also vary by region. Students in Alberta have a participation rate of almost 88% the highest employment rate (79.4%) and the lowest unemployment rate (9.7%). Employment rates are also – surprisingly – very high in Atlantic Canada as well. The real laggards in employment are Ontario (67%) and British Columbia (66%), both substantially below the national averages. Table 1 shows employment, unemployment and participation figures by various demographic characteristics.

TABLE 1: RATES OF EMPLOYMENT, UNEMPLOYMENT AND PARTICIPATION AMONG CANADIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS, SUMMER 2011

	Employment Rate	Unemployment Rate	Participation Rate
CANADA	70.9%	16.2%	84.6%
Female	73.9%	14.2%	86.1%
Male	67.0%	18.8%	82.5%
Atlantic Canada	76.3%	13.6%	88.3%
Quebec	74.1%	15.2%	87.5%
Ontario	67.6%	18.5%	82.9%
Manitoba/Saskatchewan	72.0%	14.1%	83.9%
Alberta	79.4%	9.7%	87.9%
British Columbia	66.6%	17.4%	80.6%
Education	80.5%	8.6%	88.1%
Math & Computer Science	70.3%	8.9%	77.2%
Agriculture & Environmental Sciences	85.2%	9.8%	94.4%
Health and related	75.0%	12.6%	86.3%
Engineering & Architecture	66.3%	13.2%	76.4%
Humanities	74.0%	15.1%	88.0%
Physical & Life Sciences	72.6%	17.7%	88.3%
Business	65.9%	18.2%	80.3%
Social Sciences	69.4%	18.4%	85.1%
Visual & Performing Arts	59.3%	30.4%	85.4%
18 years old	68.5%	18.8%	85.0%
19 years old	74.6%	15.1%	87.8%
20 years old	76.7%	11.9%	87.1%

21 years old	72.9%	15.9%	86.6%
22-24 years old	69.9%	15.5%	82.7%
25+ years old	55.6%	26.4%	75.5%

One of the interesting results shown in Table 1 is the very different outcomes by field of study. Students in business, mathematics & computer science, and engineering & architecture all have counter-intuitively low rates of labour market participation and employment. But this is in fact easily explainable, since these are the fields most likely to have co-operative education programs, students in these fields are likeliest to be studying full-time in the summer months, thus leading to lower participation rates.¹ As we shall see throughout this paper, students in these fields are in fact having great success in the labour market.

WHY ARE THESE LABOUR MARKET FIGURES DIFFERENT FROM STATISTICS CANADA’S?

The figures in this report are slightly different from those provided by Statistics Canada in their June Labour Force Survey (LFS) report in that both the unemployment and participation rates are higher in our survey than in the LFS (which reported them as being 11% and 75.7%, respectively). The obvious reason for any difference is the nature of the sample (the Statistics Canada headline number is “students 20-24”, whereas this study looks at university students only and is more inclusive of age). But there are two more basic methodological issues at play in terms of participation rates that lead us to report higher figures than Statistics Canada.

When Statistics Canada reports participation, they report it only for a single month. Although many people stay in the labour market for all four months of the summer, it is quite possible for people to be in some months and not others, particularly if they are undertaking summer studies. Therefore, the participation rate across the *entire* summer (which is what we measure) is somewhat higher than it is for any month.

We also use slightly different measures of how to include someone in the labour market. The LFS defines anyone who was taking a full course load during the previous 4 weeks as being “not in the labour force.” However, our data suggests that 6.6% of students were both working and taking more than three courses during the summer. Our definition, unlike Statistics Canada’s, would include them in the labour market.

¹ 15.1% of the students in the sample were enrolled in co-op programs; about half of them are on work placements.

Both our statistics and Statistics Canada's show an improvement in the unemployment situation in 2011 compared to the previous year. However, improvements in the labour market are not equally distributed by sector. Students in math & computer science and engineering & architecture are reporting an enormously improved labour market, while students in other faculties are seeing very little improvement.

Table 2 shows working students' perceptions of how easy they found it to get a job this year compared to the previous year. About half of all students saw no difference, with 28% saying they thought it was easier than 2010 and 22.6% saying it was more difficult than in 2010 – a net “plus” of 5.4%. But this figure hides some enormous differences by gender and field of study. The “plus” figure for women was 1.1%, while for men it was 11.2%. Driving this gender gap are some absolutely enormous differences by field of study: 35% in (largely male-dominated) math & computer science and 10.9% in (similarly male-dominated) engineering & architecture. In the more female-dominated fields of study like humanities and social sciences, the gap was about 2%. In education and visual & performing arts the percentage saying job-hunting was more difficult this year than last outnumbered those who said the opposite.

TABLE 2: DIFFICULTY FINDING EMPLOYMENT IN 2011 VS. 2010 (WORKING STUDENTS ONLY)

	Easier	The Same	Harder	% Pt. Change Easier/Harder Compared to 2010
CANADA	28.0%	49.4%	22.6%	+5.4%
Female	27.1%	46.9%	26.0%	+1.1%
Male	29.1%	53.0%	17.9%	+11.2%
Atlantic Canada	26.0%	51.4%	22.5%	+3.5%
Quebec	34.5%	45.6%	19.9%	+14.6%
Ontario	27.2%	50.2%	22.6%	+4.6%
Manitoba/Saskatchewan	27.0%	50.5%	22.5%	+4.5%
Alberta	25.3%	50.0%	24.7%	+0.6%
British Columbia	24.8%	49.7%	25.5%	-0.7%
Education	25.2%	47.6%	27.2%	-2.0%
Visual & Performing Arts	21.0%	44.4%	34.6%	-13.6%
Humanities	28.9%	44.3%	26.8%	+2.3%
Social Sciences	26.6%	48.9%	24.5%	+2.0%
Health and Related	22.2%	57.8%	20.0%	+2.2%
Business	23.5%	57.4%	19.1%	+4.4%
Physical & Life Sciences	29.4%	50.0%	20.6%	+8.8%
Math & Computer Science	47.5%	40.0%	12.5%	+35%
Engineering & Architecture	29.7%	51.5%	18.8%	+10.9%
Agriculture & Environmental Sciences	35.9%	46.2%	17.9%	+18.0%

HOURS AND WAGES

Among survey participants who reported being employed, the median hours of work per week in all jobs was 38 (up slightly from 36 hours last year), and median earnings were \$450/week, which also appears to be up slightly from 2010.² Despite having higher levels of unemployment, male students reported working more hours per week than female students (40 hours vs. 36 hours); they also reported receiving substantially higher median wages (\$500/week vs. \$418/week). Geographically, hours of work and remuneration were substantially higher in the Prairie provinces (especially Alberta) than elsewhere.

TABLE 3: MEDIAN HOURS OF WORK AND MEDIAN WAGES AMONG CANADIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS, SUMMER 2011

	Hourly Wage	Weekly Hours	Weekly Earnings	Full-time (30 or more hours)
CANADA	\$12.12	38	\$450	76.1%
Female	\$11.50	36	\$ 418	72.0%
Male	\$13.33	40	\$ 500	81.9%
Atlantic Canada	\$10.63	40	\$ 420	80.9%
Quebec	\$12.50	36	\$ 490	73.8%
Ontario	\$11.71	38	\$ 450	75.4%
Manitoba Saskatchewan	\$12.45	40	\$ 500	81.5%
Alberta	\$14.37	40	\$ 575	83.3%
British Columbia	\$12.78	35	\$ 440	67.5%
Education	\$12.50	40	\$ 471	84.4%
Visual & Performing Arts	\$11.44	35	\$ 450	60.6%
Humanities	\$11.00	35	\$ 400	72.9%
Social Sciences	\$11.67	35	\$ 400	64.9%
Health and related	\$12.57	40	\$ 490	76.4%
Business	\$13.18	38	\$ 500	74.7%
Physical & Life Sciences	\$11.50	40	\$ 445	80.9%
Math & Computer Science	\$14.29	38	\$ 500	86.3%
Engineering and Architecture	\$15.62	40	\$ 578	88.3%
Agriculture and Environmental Sciences	\$12.75	40	\$ 480	78.3%

² In 2010, students reported median earnings of \$440 per week. For the 2010 student employment portrait, refer to *Canadian University Students in the Summer of 2010: Wages and Employment (CEP Insight Brief #1)* at http://canedproject.ca/publications/2010/2010Aug_CEPInsight1_SummerEmployment.pdf.

In terms of fields of study, there is something of a pattern in that students in physical & life sciences, humanities and social sciences and visual & performing arts earned substantially less money than students in engineering & architecture and math & computer science, and, to a lesser extent, business. This is not simply a function of wages, but also a function of hours worked: students in fields of study receiving lower wages also tend to work fewer hours. Fewer than two-thirds of social science students, for instance, reported working more than 30 hours per week, compared to eight of nine engineering students.

It turns out that these differences by field of study fully explain the gender gap in income. The data suggest that students in male-dominated fields earn more than students in female-dominated fields. For example, students in humanities and social sciences, which are overwhelmingly female (69%), earn considerably less than students in engineering & architecture, which are overwhelmingly male (76%). Within each field of study, men and women tend to earn similar amounts (there are some differences, but they do not run consistently in favour of either gender).

Since the higher paying fields of study are also those that have the largest concentrations of co-op students, it seems that co-op placements may be driving the higher wages in these fields. Students participating in co-op placements earn about 40% more than students in the same field of study who are working but are not involved in co-op work.

Not surprisingly, the survey found that older students had a substantial wage premium compared to younger ones. Survey participants who are 18 years old reported a median hourly income of \$10.91 while those 25 years old and older reported a median income of \$13.46 per hour.

NUMBER OF JOBS HELD

Respondents who indicated that they had already obtained work by late June were then asked how many jobs they held. Three quarters of respondents (74.2%) reported having only one job, with 21.9% reporting having two jobs for the summer and 6% of respondents indicating they held three or more jobs for the summer.

Though there are differences by region, the key variable to look at once again here is field of study. In the three fields we have already identified as being “good” in terms of total income, (business, engineering & architecture, and math & computer science) students are substantially less likely to have more than one job than students in other fields. Contrarily, in those fields where income potential seems to be weak (humanities, life sciences, social sciences and visual & performing arts), students are substantially more likely to have more than one job. As with working hours and income, these fields of study differences drive the significant differences that we see in terms of gender, with women being more likely than men (24% to 18%) to hold more than one job. The tendency of co-op students in engineering & architecture, math & computer science and business not to work more than one job is a factor here as well, but does not explain the results in these three fields; their results are more or less the same whether co-op students are included or not.

COMPARISONS TO SUMMER 2010

Students who currently reported to be working in paid employment or co-op placement were asked to compare their current weekly hours and wages in June 2011 with those in June 2010. Nearly half of students (43.3%) reported they were working more hours each week compared to the same time last year, one-third (32.1%) reported to be working the same number of hours and nearly one-fourth (24.7%) reported to be working fewer number of hours as last year.

Once again, there are enormous differences by gender, field of study and region. The net increase in working hours (i.e., the percentage point increase in the number of students working more hours) was 22.4% for men and 15.8% for women. The growth in working hours was highest for students in engineering & architecture and math & computer science – male-dominated fields of study – at 28% and at 32.6%, respectively; in female-dominated fields of study – education, performing & visual arts, humanities and social sciences – it was 0.8%, 6.4%, 17% and 21.4%, respectively. Students in the Prairie provinces reported the largest net increase, (22.4% in Manitoba and Saskatchewan and 18% in Alberta), while those in Ontario reported a net increase of 20.8%. British Columbia students reported a net improvement in hours of 13.3%, while those in Atlantic Canada experienced a net improvement of 15.3%.

A majority of students (59%) reported to be earning more per week in June 2011 than in June 2010; twenty-one percent were earning less and 20% were earning the same amount per week as last year. Interestingly, students in Alberta and students in British Columbia were least likely to report an increase, with only 32.5% and 33%, respectively, reporting an increase. Students in Atlantic Canada and students in Manitoba and Saskatchewan reported the highest net increases in earnings, at 42.1% and 41.8%, respectively. Ontario students reported a net gain of 39.4%. Men reported to be earning more this June than last June with a net figure of 45.5%, compared to 33.6% for women. In male-dominated fields of study – math & computer science and engineering & architecture – the net increase in earnings was 66.6% and 50.3%, respectively; in female-dominated fields of study – education, humanities and social sciences – students reported a net increase of around 37% with the exception of students in visual & performing arts whose net increase was only 1.1%.

While students in most categories – gender, region and field of study – are generally doing better than in 2010, the 2011 labour market appears to most benefit males, students in Western Canada and those in math & computer science and engineering & architecture.

TABLE 4: NUMBER OF JOBS HELD

	One	Two	Three+
CANADA	74.2%	21.9%	6%
Female	72%	24%	4%
Male	78%	18%	4%
Atlantic Canada	75.1%	23.0%	1.9%
Quebec	75.1%	19.5%	5.4%
Ontario	74.7%	21.8%	3.6%
Manitoba and Saskatchewan	70.1%	26.1%	3.7%
Alberta	72.7%	23.4%	3.9%
British Columbia	72.2%	23.0%	4.8%
Education	64.8%	31.3%	3.9%
Visual & Performing Arts	55.3%	29.8%	14.9%
Humanities	71%	25.4%	3.6%
Social Sciences	73.9%	22.3%	3.8%
Health Related	70.7%	22.9%	6.4%
Business	82.1%	16.5%	1.3%
Physical & Life Sciences	70.6%	26.1%	3.2%
Math & Computer Science	90.3%	9.7%	0.0%
Engineering & Architecture	83.2%	12.7%	4.1%
Agriculture & Environmental Sciences	82.6%	13.0%	4.3%

JOB REQUIREMENTS: RELATIONSHIP OF PRIMARY JOB TO FIELD OF STUDY

Survey respondents were asked to characterize the relationship between their field of study and their summer jobs. For each job they held, they were asked to choose between one of four descriptions of the relationship between education and employment: “PSE is not required for this job,” “PSE is required but field of study does not matter much,” “My field of study is useful but others would have been good as well,” and “My field of study is the only/by far the best for the job.”

Just over 50% of respondents stated that some form of post-secondary education was required for their primary summer job, including 19.5% who stated that their field of study was the only one possible and by far the best field for their primary summer job. However, just over 47% of students said that their primary summer job did not require any post-secondary education at all.

Analysis by field of study makes for the most interesting reading because we again see a similar pattern playing itself out. Students enrolled in humanities (6.3%), visual & performing arts (7.3%) and social sciences (10.6%) are the least likely to report that their field of study is the best possible fit for their summer job, whereas students in math & computer science (47.1%) and engineering & architecture (35.4%) are the most likely to report that their field of study is the best fit. The converse is true with respect to jobs not requiring any PSE – roughly 60% of jobs held by humanities, social science and visual & performing arts students fit that description, compared to only about a quarter in math & computer science and engineering & architecture. It is reasonable to conclude, then, that students in certain disciplines are more likely to benefit from their summer employment because, in addition to providing remuneration, it offers work experience in an area related to their field of study. For these students, who tend to study in more technical disciplines, summer employment may be the first step toward a career in a specific industry, while for other students, summer employment may provide little more than an opportunity to earn funds to pay for school.

TABLE 5: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PROGRAM OF STUDY AND PRIMARY SUMMER JOB

	“My field of study is the only possible/by far the best field for the job”	“My field of study is useful but others would have been good, too”/ “PSE is required but field of study does not matter”	“PSE is not required for this job”
CANADA	19.5%	33.1%	47.3%
Education	16.3%	36.4%	47.3%
Visual & Performing Arts	7.4%	31.9%	60.6%
Humanities	6.3%	30.3%	63.5%
Social Science	10.6%	34.6%	54.9%
Health & Related	28.8%	28.9%	42.3%
Business	25.8%	39.1%	35.1%
Physical & Life Sciences	20.8%	29.1%	50.1%
Math & Computer Science	47.1%	29.5%	23.5%
Engineering & Architecture	35.4%	39.4%	25.3%
Agriculture & Environmental	21.7%	37%	41.3%

Science			
Hourly Wage	\$15	\$14	\$11
Weekly Earnings	\$500	\$480	\$350
Weekly Hours	40	38	32

Moreover, students who are working in areas related to their field of study are benefiting even more than those who do not, as they appear to be earning more money than those working in jobs unrelated to their course of post-secondary education. The bottom half of table 4 shows that in fact students who are able to get a job where PSE is required are rewarded for their skills; it is jobs that do not require PSE that are by far the least well-remunerated. Students whose education is described as being the best or only field for the job receive a median wage of \$15/hour, while students with jobs for which PSE is required but field of study is less of an issue receive \$14 per hour. Students with jobs not requiring PSE, on the other hand, are more likely to languish near the minimum wage line, receiving a median income of \$11 per hour.

DESIRE TO WORK MORE HOURS

This is the third year that the Canadian Education Project has asked students if they would have worked more hours had they been offered. As in each of the two previous years, a substantial majority of students replied that they would work more hours if offered similar conditions to their main job. Fifty-eight percent of respondents said they would accept more hours, 24.1% said they would not and 17.8% said they were unsure. The proportion saying they wanted more hours is almost exactly the same as in 2009 (59%) and 2010 (57%).

There are, as one would expect, some regional variations here. Students in Ontario and Atlantic Canada, where total income is lower than in Western Canada, were more likely to say they would take more hours. Students from British Columbia, interestingly, who have similarly low wage packets, were not similarly inclined to say they wanted more hours. Instead, as we will see below in Section 7, they seemed more likely to spend more time in classes instead of in paid summer employment.

As ever, there are differences by field of study; generally speaking, students from faculties earning substantial amounts of money tend to be less desirous of working more hours than students from faculties earning less.³ This is an interesting finding because it suggests that students might not wish to *maximize* their summer revenues; instead, they may be acting to reach a certain minimum income (presumably enough to let them live comfortably during the school year) and then stopping.⁴

There is a gender gap on this question, with women more likely to be seeking more hours than men, but as with previous questions, this appears to be a reflection of field of study differences rather than gender differences *per se*. There is also a significant age factor here as well, with younger students (who tend to earn less money per hour) being significantly more interested in working more hours than older students.

³ The fields of study that lead to more earnings include math & computer science and engineering & architecture.

⁴ The most common reason for not wanting to work more was balance between work and personal life at 64.1%, followed by already working enough hours at 61.6%, scheduling issues related to summer school at 21.5%, low prospects of making more money from working more at 14.8%, scheduling issues related to another job at 13.4% and other reasons at 12.1%.

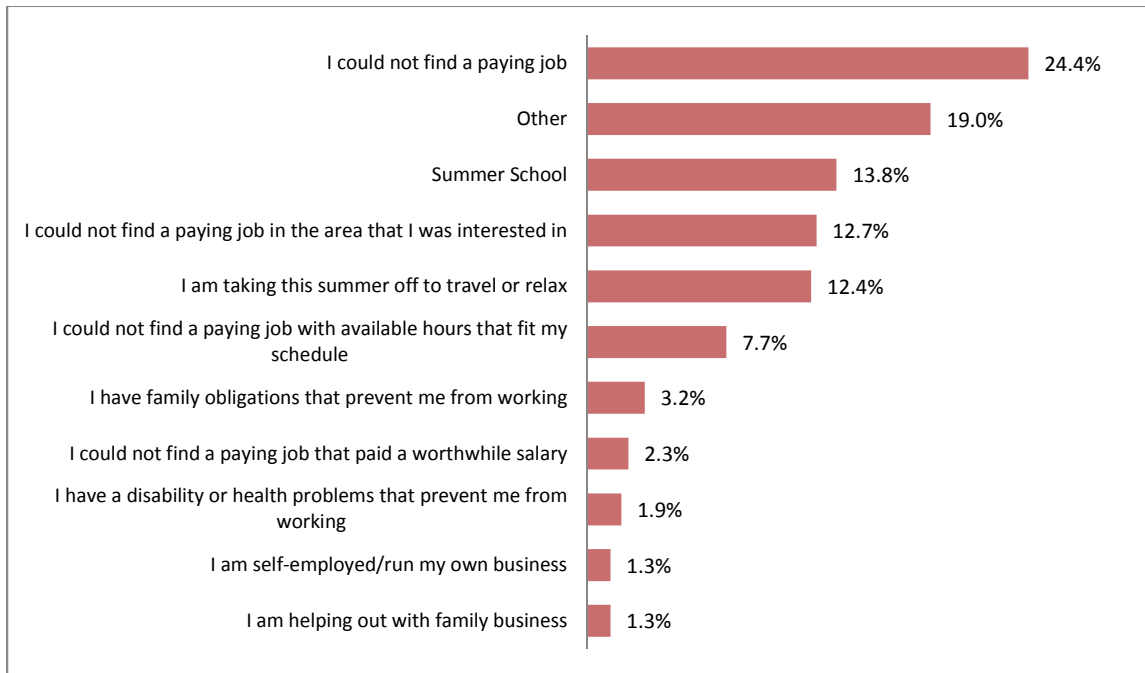
TABLE 6: WOULD YOU WORK MORE HOURS AT THE SAME JOB?

	Yes	No	Not Sure
CANADA	58.1%	24.1%	17.8%
Female	61.5%	20.9%	17.5%
Male	53.0%	28.5%	18.5%
Atlantic Canada	62.7%	19.6%	17.7%
Quebec	49.9%	28.4%	21.7%
Ontario	61.0%	22.8%	16.2%
Manitoba and Saskatchewan	56.3%	31.1%	12.6%
Alberta	59.3%	20.1%	20.6%
British Columbia	55.5%	25.8%	18.7%
Education	63.3%	25%	11.7%
Visual & Performing Arts	59.6%	25.5%	14.9%
Humanities	63.2%	16%	20.4%
Social Science	62.2%	20.1%	17.7%
Health & Related	62.8%	26.3%	10.9%
Business	57.1%	28.1%	14.7%
Physical & Life Sciences	51.6%	28.4%	20.0%
Math & Computer Science	53.9%	28.4%	17.6%
Engineering & Architecture	49.2%	25.4%	25.4%
Agriculture & Environmental Sciences	55.6%	28.9%	15.6%
18 years old	61.8%	23.7%	14.5%
19 years old	67.2%	20.9%	11.9%
20 years old	58.8%	19.3%	21.8%
21 years old	56.6%	23.5%	19.9%
22-24 years old	53.3%	27.8%	18.9%
25+ years old	52.0%	35.8%	12.2%

UNEMPLOYMENT AND NON-PARTICIPATION

Almost one third (29.1%) of students reported not working in paid employment this summer. Only about a quarter of these students said they could not find a job (though in another 22.7% of cases there was what might be called a conditional inability to find work, i.e., “couldn’t find a paying job that fit my schedule,” “couldn’t find a job that paid sufficiently” or “couldn’t find a job that was related to my field of study”). Fourteen percent of non-working students said their academic schedule precluded them from working, while 12.4% of non-working students said they were not working because they had taken the summer off to relax or travel.

FIGURE 1: REASONS FOR NOT WORKING



SUMMER SCHOOL

Forty-two percent of survey respondents reported to be taking summer courses in 2011, up slightly from 38% in 2010. Of these, 41% are taking one course, 25% are taking two courses and 33% are taking three or more courses. Nearly half of students in British Columbia reported to be taking summer courses, which may account for our earlier finding that median weekly hours worked was at a 35 hours per week in the province, lower than elsewhere. Conversely, Alberta students are the least likely to be attending school – but reported spending a median of 40 hours per week at work.

Women are more likely to be spending time in summer school (45% of women vs. 38.5% of men); however, among those studying, men were substantially likelier to be taking heavier course loads. This seems to be due to the issue of co-operative education, where many students spend summers working while working in placements during the fall or winter terms, and which tends to be more common in male-dominated fields of study such as engineering & architecture and math & computer science. There is also a clear age difference, with older students being substantially more likely to take summer courses than younger ones.

Table 7: Percentage of Students Taking Summer School and Number of Courses

	Taking Summer School	Of those studying, proportion taking...		
		One Course	Two Courses	Three or More
CANADA	42.2%	40.6%	25.4%	34%
Female	45.0%	44.6%	26.7%	28.7%
Male	38.5%	34.3%	23.1%	42.5%
Atlantic Canada	36.5%	41.4%	26.3%	32.3%
Quebec	44.5%	37.9%	22.8%	39.2%
Ontario	42.9%	43.9%	23.7%	42.0%
Manitoba/Saskatchewan	43.8%	42.9%	33.8%	23.4%
Alberta	33.2%	48.2%	28.2%	23.5%
British Columbia	47.6%	26.4%	29.1%	44.6%
Education	44.9%	57.4%	27.9%	14.7%
Visual & Performing Arts	39.9%	42.9%	34.9%	22.2%
Humanities	38.4%	43.5%	28.6%	10.5%
Social Sciences	43.8%	37.4%	30.4%	18.1%
Health Related	48.6%	47.0%	22.0%	7.6%
Business	50.0%	29.0%	23.7%	19.6%
Physical & Life Sciences	36.2%	54.1%	25.1%	20.8%
Math & Computer Science	46.2%	34.3%	19.4%	46.3%
Engineering & Architecture	43.1%	26.6%	12.9%	60.5%
Agriculture & Environmental Sciences	40.7%	45.5%	22.7%	31.8%

18 years old	25.9%	66.7%	20.0%	13.3%
19 years old	35.0%	45.3%	24.8%	29.8%
20 years old	39.6%	40.9%	24.9%	34.2%
21 years old	42.5%	44.2%	22.7%	33.1%
22-24 years old	49.0%	37.5%	26.2%	36.3%
25+ years old	49.6%	31.5%	29.0%	39.5%

CONCLUSION

It seems fairly clear that the summer of 2011 is going better for students than the summer of 2010; student employment and income are unambiguously up. But it is an uneven recovery. Students in the Prairies seem to be doing fine, and students in Atlantic seem very able to get work, even if it is not particularly well-paid work. However, students from Ontario and British Columbia seem to be having difficulty finding steady, decent-paying work.

But of potentially more interest than geographic differences are the gaps that are opening up between fields of study. It seems clear that much of the improvement this year has come in a few very specific fields: students in math & computer science and engineering & architecture in particular (and other sciences and business to a lesser extent) are having a much easier time finding jobs. They are also more likely to work more hours, work a single job rather than multiple jobs, earn more, and work in a job related to their field of study. In other words, what we are seeing this summer is a two-speed recovery. For more scientific and technically minded students, we are seeing a substantial improvement; for others, this summer looks a lot like last summer, when students were by and large still feeling the effects of the recession.

Much of the success of the scientific and technical fields of study appear to be due to the fact that they are particularly heavy in co-operative education, as co-op students appear to be doing best of all in the summer job market. But even among non-co-op students, the ability of students in these fields to get high paying summer jobs relevant to their discipline is quite high. Not so for students in the social sciences, humanities and other less technically oriented disciplines, where well over half say they are working in jobs for which post-secondary education is not even necessary. As a result, they earn between 20% and 45% less than students in more technically oriented fields, even though they are likelier to be working two or more jobs.

Canada has policies to help those who don't do quite so well in the summer labour market; students from less well-paid fields of study may benefit disproportionately from various need-based loans and grants programs. But these findings suggest that the co-op model, which enables students to earn money in the labour market in a manner that complements their course of study, might be of value to students in non-technical disciplines. This year's summer survey suggests that the case for spreading the benefits of co-operative education to disciplines outside the traditional scientific and technical core is very strong and needs to be pursued much more vigorously.



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