

The Successful Alumni

by

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Abstract

This study analyzes the barriers that university graduates are facing in finding appropriate work post-graduation and investigates ways that universities can assist their students in transitioning into the labour market. An examination of current statistics and literature provide this study with up-to-date data on millennial employability. The study analyzes the policies used at Ontario universities with top employment rates and combines this with expert interviews of employment service professionals. Results indicate that students are lacking a combination of comprehensive labour market information, as well as transferable skills and experience. The study recommends a reform to current work experience programs at universities, as well as increased access to labour market information.

Keywords: Millennials; Underemployment; Unemployment; Transitioning to Work; University; Post-Graduate Employment

Dedication

For my lovely Ma'. God bless you, I could not have finished without your motivation, humour and love. Thank you for your encouragement during the process and helping me to see the larger picture of completing this work.

I would also like to dedicate this research to my friends and fellow alumni from Ontario. Your friendship and laughter has made this degree easier. The perseverance and dedication each of you has had in creating the lives you want is an inspiration.

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Table of Contents

Approval	ii
Partial Copyright Licence	iii
Ethics Statement	iv
Abstract	v
Dedication	vi
Acknowledgements	vii
Table of Contents	viii
List of Tables	xi
List of Figures	xi
Glossary	xii
Executive Summary	xiii
Chapter 1. Introduction	1
Chapter 2. Background of the Regional Context.....	2
2.1. Ontario’s Youth Employment History	2
2.2. Why Millennial Employment is so important for Canada	3
Chapter 3. Debates and Solutions in the Literature	4
3.1. Education and Degree Choices.....	4
3.1.1. University vs. College Degrees	5
3.1.2. The Liberal Arts Alumni.....	7
3.2. The Recession	9
3.3. Solution Based Literature	10
3.3.1. Social Capital	10
3.3.2. Skills Gapping	10
3.3.3. Experience	11
3.3.4. Dream Jobs vs. Survival Jobs.....	11
3.3.5. Using Career Services Early	12
3.3.6. Online Presence and Branding	12
Chapter 4. Methodology.....	13
4.1. Literature Review	13
4.2. Case Studies.....	14
4.3. Semi-Structured Interviews	14
Chapter 5. Universities Producing Strong Alumni- Case Studies	17
5.1. Case Study Introductions	19
5.2. Student Career Planning/ Support Centers.....	20
5.3. Bilingual and ESL Integration	21

5.4. Strong Alumni Support: Social Networking & Mentoring	23
5.5. Work Experience Programs	27
5.6. Community Engagement.....	28
Chapter 6. Interview Key Findings	30
6.1. Self-Understanding	30
6.1.1. Knowing Your Desired Lifestyle	30
6.1.2. Standards and Expectations	32
6.1.3. Personal Branding and Reputation	32
6.2. Soft Skills in the Generation Gap	33
6.2.1. Multi-Generational Competition and Communication.....	34
6.2.2. Story Telling and Body Language	34
6.2.3. Social Capital	35
6.3. Survival Jobs and Dream Jobs.....	36
6.3.1. The Impact of Taking a Survival Job.....	36
6.3.2. The Impact of Holding Out for a Dream Job	37
6.3.3. Alumni Mobility	37
6.4. The Labour Market and Indentured Students.....	38
6.4.1. Complexities of Work Experience and the Labour Market	38
6.4.2. Labour Market Training and University Communication	39
6.4.3. Subsidization by the Tax Payer	40
Chapter 7. Policy Options	41
7.1. Ethical Work Experience Programs & Labour Market Partnerships.....	41
7.1.1. Increased Work Experience	42
7.1.2. The Ethical Employment of Youth.....	42
7.1.3. Labour Market Participation	43
7.2. Complementary Skill Alternatives for Students	44
7.2.1. Increased Numbers of Required Courses.....	44
7.2.2. Complementary Certificate Courses	44
7.2.3. Multi-Education Type Additions	45
7.3. Increased Student Awareness and Transparency Programs.....	45
Chapter 8. Criteria and Measures for Policy Options.....	46
8.1. Evaluation Matrix Findings	48
8.1.1. Ethical Work Experience Programs & Labour Market Partnerships.....	48
8.1.2. Complementary Skill Alternatives for Students	48
8.1.3. Increased Student Awareness and Transparency Programs.....	49
Chapter 9. Policy Recommendation and Summary.....	50
9.1. Recommended Implementation Strategy and Next Steps	50
9.2. Conclusion	51

References	52
Appendix A. Interview Topics and Questions	56

List of Tables

Table 5-1	Graduate Employment Rates (University M. , n.d.)	18
Table 8-1	Criteria and Measures.....	47
Table 8-2	Criteria Evaluation Matrix.....	47

List of Figures

Figure 3-1	Unemployment Rate in Ontario between 1990 and 2014. CANSIM Data	6
Figure 3-2:	Employment Rate of Ontario Graduates 2 Years Out, Classes of 1999 to 2011 (Usher, 2014).....	8
Figure 3-3:	Average Income (in \$2013) 2 Years After Graduation, Ontario Graduating Classes from 2003-2011, Selected Disciplines (Usher, 2014)	8

Glossary

Term	Definition
Millennial/ Youth	“Millennial” is defined as persons born between 1979 and 1995 (persons 20-35 years old in 2015). This paper will use the terms “Millennial” and “Youth” interchangeably throughout the entire text.
Baby Boomer	A “Baby Boomer” is a person born between 1946 and 1964 (persons 51-69 years old in 2015).
Work Experience/ Placement	Work Experience/ Placement is used to describe any type of work program. This includes but is not limited to: Coops, Internships, Work-Study, and Work Placements.
Graduated/ Graduation	Persons who have attended and completed a university degree, both part time and full time. This includes all lengths of time taken to finish a degree.
Underemployed	Is participation in a low skilled job; one that could be acquired without postsecondary education.
Unemployed	Persons currently without employment that are actively seeking to be employed

Executive Summary

Unemployment and underemployment is a growing problem for millennials graduating university in Ontario. This study analyzes the barriers that university graduates are facing in finding appropriate work post-graduation and investigates ways that universities can assist their students in transitioning into the labour market. This study develops a policy analysis approach to explore options that universities can take to increase the employability of graduating students. The policy is framed within the context of:

- Historic employability rates of university graduates
- Current employment programs in place at universities
- Current labour market trends

This study uses three methods of analysis: a literature review, three case studies and four expert interviews.

The literature review provides the study with up-to-date data on millennial employability. The literature review looks at current employment statistics in Ontario for students post-graduation, ongoing debates on education purpose, and current programs and policies in place at universities across Canada. The key findings are:

- High rates of unemployment and under employment across the province
- The rate of employment a university degree and specific university degree types
- Solutions such as: soft skills, networking, work experience, and mentoring

The three case studies assess current policy options and programs provided at universities across Ontario. The key programs are:

- Coop and other work experience placements
- Use of social media and social networking

- Language support and Bilingual language focus
- Mentoring and Community focused volunteering and engagement

The four expert interviews of employment service professionals from employment centers in cities with the highest rates of millennial unemployment. The key findings from the interviews include:

- Students lacking labour market and self-awareness
- Soft Skills across generations
- Advantages and disadvantages of underemployment vs. waiting for a dream job

The study identifies three policy options from results that indicate students are lacking a combination of comprehensive labour market information, as well as transferable skills and experience. The study recommends a reform to current work experience programs at universities, as well as increased access to labour market information

Chapter 1.

Introduction

Education choices and university programs are an important factor in finding meaningful employment long term. This project analyzes current issues in university graduate employment rates and addresses the policy problem: too many millennial university graduates are underemployed and unemployed. “Too many” is defined as any percentage higher than the national average in unemployment. “Millennial” is defined as persons born between 1979 and 1995 (persons currently 20-35 years old). “Underemployed” is defined as a low skilled job; one that could be acquired without postsecondary education. This project seeks to answer the research question: how can universities increase the employability of alumni post-graduation?

Chapter 2.

Background of the Regional Context

2.1. Ontario's Youth Employment History

Ontario is Canada's most populous province, containing 39% of the Canadian population (Canada, 2015). During the past twenty years the province has experienced economic peaks and valleys, maintaining an unemployment rate close to 7% over the decades (Canada, 2015). Recently the province is struggling with integrating the millennial generation into the labour force, causing increasing numbers of new university graduates to flounder soon after graduation. The Council of Ontario Universities has stated that since the 2008 recession that ravaged the province's manufacturing sector, recent graduates have had increasing issues joining the labour market (Universities, 2014). 25% of millennials with a university degree are underemployed, working in jobs that require low skills and pay at or slightly above minimum wage (Kolm, 2013). That number increases to 30% for graduates between the ages of 25 and 30 years old (Kolm, 2013). This indicates that students who graduated during the 2008 recession have still not recovered almost half a decade later. Canada's largest city, Toronto, has been wrestling with a youth unemployment rate of 21% and the province has an overall youth unemployment rate of close to 17% (Leung, 2012). It is clear from this data that the millennial generation will need to find ways to better equip themselves for a changing and difficult labour market.

Despite these statistics, a university degree still remains the clearest indicator of long term financial stability and success in Ontario. "University graduates are the only group in the 25 to 29 year age range to increase their share of total employment over the last ten years" (compared to college and high school graduates) , and over a lifetime a university degree appears to be paying off (Universities, 2014). Millennials with

university degrees continue to hold the highest share of total millennial employment in the province and the requirement for knowledge based skills is increasing exponentially in the region (Universities, 2014). It is apparent from these statistics how important the transition period between university graduation and employment is to the millennial generation. Students and universities need to equip themselves for navigating the transition to employment after graduation.

2.2. Why Millennial Employment is so important for Canada

Millennials now at employment age will be taking over responsibility for the financial stability of the country and be supporting the increasing population of seniors in Canada (Taylor, 2005). The Millennial population is the largest cohort after the Baby Boomers, yet is still significantly smaller in size (Canada, Generations in Canada, 2011). The ratio of Canadians in labour force participation age (25-54 years) in comparison to those younger or older will remain a concern to the economic stability of Canada. In the future a smaller number of working age adults will need to support an increasing number of retiring Canadians. It is critical that millennials are economically stable in the Ontario economy and making strides into the labour market over the next decade.

Chapter 3.

Debates and Solutions in the Literature

The economic security of millennials lies in their ability to find stable, well-paying jobs now and in the future. This section identifies the current state of millennial alumni employment in Ontario, what problems currently exist in the labour market for students post-graduation and what solutions current authors have already recommended. This section will review the main arguments and theories on millennial underemployed and unemployment.

3.1. Education and Degree Choices

Literature clearly indicates an ongoing debate over the value of a university degree and the worth of differing degree types (Canada, Education in Canada: Attainment, Field of Study and Location of Study, 2011). It is evident from the research that university graduates make more money over a lifetime (Universities, 2014); however, the transition into employment is argued to be easier for millennials with a college or trades degree (Universities, 2014) than for those with certain university degrees. The two main debates are: the comparison between university and college/trades schools and secondly the relative employable value of a liberal arts education in comparison to other degree types. This debate is important to better understanding how university graduates can become more employable. By examining the opportunities and challenges, universities and students are able to better understand the skills and experiences that may be missing from a university degree and work to bridge these gaps.

3.1.1. University vs. College Degrees

The existing debate concerning a college vs. a university degree is important to this research as it discusses the desirability of certain skills in the labour market, transferability of skills, and what areas can be improved in the current organization of education systems in Ontario. The literature reveals a fundamental disagreement in Ontario about the role of a university degree (Canada, Education in Canada: Attainment, Field of Study and Location of Study, 2011). Researchers point out that many students are entering university with dreams of employment but are not looking at college to find the skills they may need for their career choices (Wray, 2013). University professors Ken Coates and Bill Morrison, Authors of *Campus Confidential* argue that university is a place of higher education and not a means to employment. They argue that in universities, “many students are completing their university degrees with a minimal amount of effort (and the maximum amount of socializing), leaving them with few desirable skills” (Wray, 2013). The Conference Board of Canada sites that 40% of new jobs by 2020 will be in the skills trades and technology sector (CNW, 2012). Workopolis, states that millennials are “overeducated” and indicate that college leads to clear and stable employment after graduation, while many recent university graduates are employed in low skilled jobs such as waitressing post-graduation(Wray, 2013). These researchers are sceptical of the assumption by millennials that university is a platform to direct employable skills, and maintain that college and trades schools are better suited towards the aspirations of many millennials.

On the other side of the debate, Statistics Canada finds that during a lifetime university graduates earn a substantially higher wage than other post-secondary education types (Canada, Education in Canada: Attainment, Field of Study and Location of Study, 2011). The Ontario Council of Universities cites that the employment fluctuations of university graduates is significantly less and argue that university is still the key to success in the labour market. Using Statistics Canada information they concluded that university graduates still have significantly lower rates of unemployment over time.

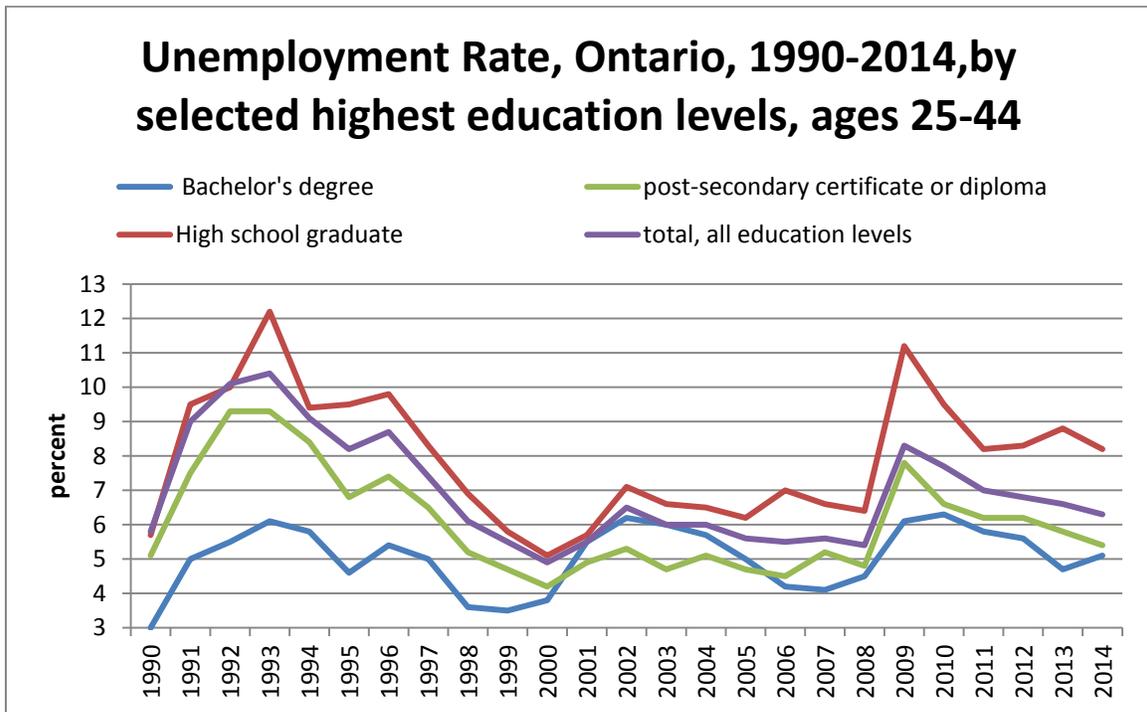


Figure 3-1 Unemployment Rate in Ontario between 1990 and 2014. CANSIM Data

Figure 3-1 (above) reviews these findings, and shows significantly lower rates of unemployment for university graduates. Interestingly, this graph also illustrates how similar the unemployment rates are between university graduates and college graduates. The graph indicates that unemployment rates of university graduates are lower across time. Since 2008 all education levels have experienced increased amounts of unemployment, although those with college and university degrees have been the most stable employment during times of recession.

Despite the confusion over the purpose of a university degree in millennials' lives, over 25% of Ontario's population has a university degree according to the latest Census (Canada, Education in Canada: Attainment, Field of Study and Location of Study, 2011). This percentage has increased over the past 10 years indicating a growth in university degrees among millennials (Canada, Education in Canada: Attainment, Field of Study and Location of Study, 2011). The sheer number of Ontario youth who are investing in university indicates that these degrees need to be integrated into the labour market for Canada's future stability.

3.1.2. The Liberal Arts Alumni

The debate over which universities degree programs is more marketable is long standing. The discussion of university graduate unemployment in relation to the number of students enrolled in “liberal arts” degrees is compared often by researchers. Research on how employable a graduate with a liberal arts degree is in comparison to other university degrees. One author wrote, “Canadian youth are overqualified and there are too many with the same degree competing for a limited number of jobs” (Benes, 2012). The Chronicle for Higher Employment states that their polls conclude that, “more than half of all employers reported difficulty finding qualified candidates for the job, citing oral and written communications, problem solving, organizational and project management as sought-after skills”(Wray, 2013) (Jr., 2015). These skills are found in a variety of university degrees but most notably in the liberal arts. Yet other researchers point towards more “practical programs”, such as Lauren Friese who wrote, “unfortunately, [it] is a common story among graduates in Canada struggling to find meaningful work after graduation, in part because they chose an arts education over more practical programs such as business and engineering” (Friese, 2012). This conflicting research points to the lack of clarity around what skills and job prospects are available by following a specific university degree. Many students follow prepackaged degree routes because they are unaware of trends in the labour market or lack the understanding of what to expect in terms of career options after graduating (Friese, 2012). Because of this millennials are failing to choose an education that matches their future career desires and lifestyles.

Statistics on income and degree type indicate the labour markets needs for certain degree types (Usher, 2014). Below (Figure 3-2) is a researcher’s graph that tracks the changes in income of each degree type over time. In the early 2000’s graduates with humanities degrees made an average income that is much higher than today’s current average wage for people with similar degrees, but a lot of this decline occurred after the 2008 recession. Whether this is a permanent economic pattern will be determined over time. Below is another graph (Figure 3-3) that reviews the employment rates of graduates two years after graduation. It shows a similar pattern with liberal arts degrees having comparable employment rates during the early 2000’s, and then

dropping off quite significantly after 2008. This may say more about the economic climate than the overall employability of differing degrees.

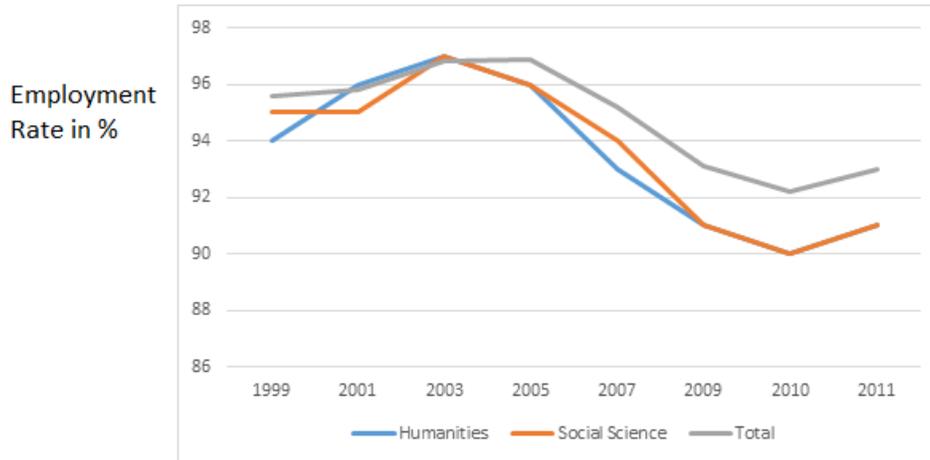


Figure 3-2: Employment Rate of Ontario Graduates 2 Years Out, Classes of 1999 to 2011 (Usher, 2014)

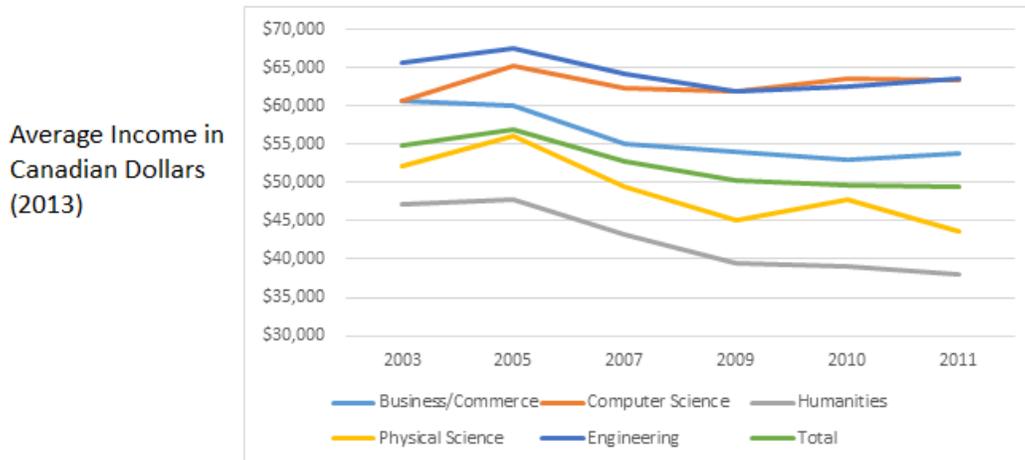


Figure 3-3: Average Income (in \$2013) 2 Years After Graduation, Ontario Graduating Classes from 2003-2011, Selected Disciplines (Usher, 2014)

The literature indicates that there is a climate of confusion around the economic value of certain degrees and changing perceptions around the role of universities in providing employable skills (Usher, 2014). Furthermore the literature points to the fact that students require a way to understand what skills they are acquiring and what future

jobs are available with them (Friese, 2012). The literature demonstrates the need for understanding labour market fluctuations and transferable skills required for students to make conscious and insightful choices.

3.2. The Recession

The literature suggests that the current economic state of the province is playing a large part in millennials ability to find suitable employment (Canada, Labour Force Charecteristics, Seasonally Adjusted, by Province, 2015). Since 2008 Ontario has seen significant changes in its manufacturing sector and the population has experienced unemployment for an extended period of time (Canada, Labour Force Charecteristics, Seasonally Adjusted, by Province, 2015). A study by Tiessen finds that “almost a quarter of the province’s unemployed people have been so for 27 weeks or more” and goes on to suggests that long periods of unemployment lead to a decline in social capital and ability to find work (Paperny, 2014). If this conclusion is applied to millennials who have recently graduated we see a double edge sword: those graduating without social networks may find it increasingly hard to create these networks once underemployed or unemployed.

Some literature suggests that Ontario may be experiencing structural changes in the fundamental organization of its economy. Sean Geobey, author of *The Young and The Jobless*, concluded that “youth joblessness isn’t merely the result of the cyclical up-and-down caused by the 2008-09 global financial crisis: it’s the by-product of a strong structural component within the provinces labour market” (Geobey, 2013). Among recent graduates “last year, university graduates were more likely than anyone else in that age group to be employed and just as likely to be working as the same age group was back in 2005 when no one fretted about jobs” (Dehaas, 2013). These researchers are suggesting that Ontario is moving away from certain jobs and shifting towards new technologies and a knowledge based economy.

3.3. Solution Based Literature

The literature presented in this section reviews the common confusions and arguments surrounding millennial alumni employment. These sections review the current standing of students in the Ontario labour market. This next section will review the most prevalent solutions recommended in the literature and examine the arguments for each of these recommendations to be implemented in universities.

3.3.1. Social Capital

Building social capital is widely described in the literature, and belongs to other similar categories like, “networking”, “gaining ties” and “soft skills”. Social capital in relation to employment, describes the phenomenon of being able to find work through people you know (America). Finding employment through networking is the most common and arguably the most effective way to find employment for millennials (Adams, 2011). The research however, does not provide direct advice on how to build social capital. Suggestions such as networking online, getting involved in the industry through volunteering, conventions and internships, as well as finding a mentor have been researched and proven to boost social capital (Adams, 2011). Simply getting involved and finding other people that are working in the industry is crucial to finding employment at any age, but is most important during the early years as one builds their social network (Adams, 2011). One researcher suggested really scouting out professionals that are three to four years into the job you want to have. It is important to note that the literature reviewed mainly off campus engagement as effective, since campus related clubs may not provide mature social networks that could provide later employment (Smith, 2015).

3.3.2. Skills Gapping

Recognition and leveraging of transferable skills is necessary to finding a career across multiple sectors. One researcher stated that, “skills allow you to take your career in multiple directions, which is ever more important in an unstable job market” (Poswolsky, 2014). Skills matching is the process of understanding your own skills and

how they can apply to an employer. Students need to find ways to describe or transfer their current skills from university to a broader context in the work environment (Guy, 2014). When looking for employment, leveraging a certain skill can be the difference to gaining employment over another candidate (Silva-Powell, 2012). Therefore the literature suggests that students need to better review what employers are looking for and how they can provide these skills.

3.3.3. Experience

Experience, through coops, internships or volunteering, is an essential component to finding meaningful work after university (Silva-Powell, 2012). Countless researchers and authors have pointed out the importance of having at least some sort of familiarity with how a workplace functions (Poswolsky, 2014) (Guy, 2014) (Wray, 2013). Some researchers claim that any type of work or volunteering is good for future employment; working at services jobs such as fast food although unrelated, show a student's ability to time manage, work in a team, and take initiative. Other researchers push for experience in specific fields of interest citing the networking opportunities and the chance to understand the sectors characteristics as being valuable to longer term employment (Silva-Powell, 2012). Both types of experience are shown to be beneficial in the literature to finding employment, and each type of work may be embarked at different times in a millennial's labour force participation (America).

3.3.4. Dream Jobs vs. Survival Jobs

The first job after graduating university seems is the initial hurdle of moving into a career. The literature has two main perspectives on finding employment: The first focuses on taking any possible employment, even if it is far below the education level of the applicant (Guy, 2014). The second looks at holding out for a job in the field of choice. Each of these perspectives has obvious gains and disadvantages. Taking a "survival job" to pay bills has the advantage of staying in the labour market, this may lead to networking, and looks better on a resume than large periods of unemployment. Unfortunately this can also lead to labour frustration, losing established networks, and is generally experienced as disheartening by millennials (Friese, 2012). Holding out for

employment in a desired company or field has the advantage that a person is more likely to gain employment at in that career path if they are actively pursuing it; however, literature warns against long periods of unemployment or narrowing ones interests too thinly (Geobey, 2013).

3.3.5. Using Career Services Early

Students need to begin thinking about employment long before embarking on finding a place in the labour market. The literature recommends that students undertake a deep consideration about the end results that are desired from their university degree, before and during undergraduate studies (Guppy, 1997). Career and advising centers on campus can introduce new opportunities and lead students to a better understanding of what is available to them after graduation. Literature suggest that students who look into career centers at the beginning of their studies are more likely to find employment and get more out of their undergraduate experience (Poswolsky, 2014).

3.3.6. Online Presence and Branding

Online profiles and social media have become commonplace for most millennials, but using these tools correctly can make a big impact on employment rates. Literature mainly reviewed media as a way to connect with other individuals in the labour force and as a networking tool (Gilbert, 2009). Having an online presence to showcase positive aspects of a millennial's life can help employers to make a favorable impression of the job applicants. Profiles such as LinkedIn* help students network in addition to opening them up for job hunters (Poswolsky, 2014).

Chapter 4.

Methodology

The major problem for millennial university graduates is understanding the foundational requirements needed to transition between university and meaningful work in the labour market. Another component of the issue is the lack of information that could guide students through transitional periods. To better evaluate the problems surrounding millennial employment among recent graduates in Ontario, and to explore the policy tools that may enhance university educations, this study uses three research methods. These tools are: a literature review, instructive case studies and semi-structured interviews.

4.1. Literature Review

The literature examines the current situation in Canada for young alumni; plus the major problems and complaints coming out the labour market. The data is collected from a wide range of online journals, search engines, books, and reports. This information provides the basis for guiding case study choice and initial topic outlines within the semi-structured interviews. Furthermore the information provided by the literature is augmented with the data uncovered in the case studies and semi-structured interviews, and is used to assess the policy options. The available literature provides an overview of differing academic research and opinion articles. This research provides a statistical overview of the known employment issues for millennials. The literature review is instrumental in the formation of interview questions and provides a basis for analysis. The literature review is limited in its range as it is concentrated on more recent articles, this was purposeful as prior literature looked at previous generations in differing economic periods.

4.2. Case Studies

Case studies in this research are developed to accentuate the policies that current Ontario universities have developed to increase the employability of alumni. The case studies provide clear and tangible policies that are being utilized by universities across Ontario. Although the research in this study only includes three universities with top employment rates of alumni, this provides a clear view of some of the best policies currently working and provides an overview of what components are missing in other universities with lower post-graduation employment rates. Furthermore, these case studies observe some of the vastly differing ways that Ontario universities are approaching similar issues providing a range of policy options available.

The case studies were selected by analyzing two data sets that encompass the period directly after the 2008 recession. The data sets reviewed the employment of graduates for the period of six months after university and at the two year mark after graduating. By reviewing the period directly after the recession as well as more current data the study is able to see the direct consequences of the universities' policies over the past several years through statistical examination.

The case studies are limited by the number that were selected and due to the self-reporting aspect of the research. The universities chosen are based on third party statistics, but the majority of information gathered on services available is published by the universities being studied. This is a benefit to the study, in that it helped to show what could easily be found by students online and through general research; on the other hand it also limited the studies scope to only published or documented student services. It may have underestimated in-course or campus wide services that are not electronically available.

4.3. Semi-Structured Interviews

The final portion of the study is dedicated to semi-structured interviews with industry stakeholders. The interviews focus on the expertise and insights of people working directly with under- and unemployed millennials who have graduated from

university. The interviewees are selected from across Ontario, but focus on the cities who have the highest millennial unemployment (Toronto, London, Windsor, Oshawa, and Brantford (Geobey, 2013) (Leung, 2012). They provide ground level, nuanced perspectives on the policy issue and are used to provide specific, goal oriented policies to recommend to universities.

Interviewees were contacted by phone and sent follow up information and consent through email. The interviews were conducted over the phone. Each interviewee contacted was in employment services industry or a not-for-profit focussing on employment of millennials in Ontario.

Interview topics are the same for all participants, but each was given the opportunity to express their own views and opinions. Participants, their titles, and work places are confidential. Interview questions can be found in the appendix. Participants were selected based on their working roles and locations. The initial selection was done through online researching of employment centers and resources in selected cities in Ontario, but not-for-profits that were cross regional were also contacted for interviews. Based on the small sample size and recruitment criteria the samples cannot be said to be representative or statistically significant.

The study is limited by the nature of the research method being primarily based on online and published sources. This is advantageous in that it only reviews employment centers and not-for-profits that are searchable on the internet and it narrows the findings down to easily accessible and media friendly sources. This is also a limitation as it may not involve smaller, grassroots or non-digital sources of employment support in cities.

The interview participants are employed at non-profit or publically funded employment centers. The majority of private employment services and head hunters were not available to participate in the research. This limits the study to a specific grouping of individuals. This may be due, in part, to the fact that many employment agencies are paid by companies to hire employees on their behalf on a commission based salary. It could also be that they are more focused on the actual end result of finding employment for individuals, while non-profits and some publically funded centers

are focused on larger range employment problems. Whatever the underlying cause of this dichotomy, this is s a limitation in the research as employees from privately funded employments centers are not included in this study.

Chapter 5.

Universities Producing Strong Alumni- Case Studies

Case Studies provide important information about policies in place and their success in improving employment of alumni. The Universities selected have been chosen by data of alumni employment directly after the 2009 recession. The table below (Table 5-1) describes two records, one of alumni employment six months after graduation and one of employment rates two years after graduation. McMaster University (not used as a case study) presents this information to help with transparency and to fulfill the Government of Canada's mandate that universities must record and present current findings on their alumni employment rates. The data have the potential to be biased by McMaster University due to the fact that the university are competing for students with other universities; however the data met the specifications of the government and proved unfavorable for McMaster University. The universities presented in this paper for case study are as follows: Laurentian University, Ottawa University and Wilfrid Laurier University. Each of these three universities had high alumni employment levels both six months after graduation and two years after graduation. The University of Ontario: Institute of Technology (UOIT) has been left out of this study because the type of education it provides is outside the scope of this study. This study will review the policies that these high ranking universities have in place to help their students gain employment after graduation. Many of these policies are common at Ontario universities and provide an examples of policies that are already in place and thought to be beneficial to alumni employment rates at universities.

Table 5-1 Graduate Employment Rates (University M. , n.d.)

University	Graduation Rate	Employment Rate (Graduates from 2009)	
		6 months	2 years
Laurentian	73.10%	92.10%	94.80%
Brock	80.10%	91.90%	93.30%
Ottawa	80.70%	90.50%	94.20%
Guelph	81.70%	89.50%	93.50%
Wilfrid Laurier	84.20%	89.20%	94.80%
Queen's	92.20%	88.50%	92.80%
Ryerson	77.50%	88.40%	94.80%
Trent	72.20%	88.30%	91.20%
Western	87.10%	88.20%	94.20%
Nipissing	85.20%	87.90%	93.70%
McMaster	87.20%	87.90%	92.80%
York	76.50%	87.50%	91.70%
Lakehead	78.80%	87.20%	93.60%
Waterloo	84.00%	87.00%	93.50%
Toronto	83.20%	85.10%	91.70%
Carleton	70.50%	84.50%	91.70%
Ontario Institute of Technology	73.00%	84.40%	95.30%
Algoma	58.60%	82.90%	92.50%
Windsor	75.80%	82.90%	91.10%
Hearst	65.60%	80.00%	UNK
OCAD	67.80%	75.20%	91.00%

It is important for readers to note that the case studies presented in this research have a major limitation due to the fact that each of these universities resides in a city that has relatively high employment rates. Therefore it is impossible to conclude whether the universities presented in this research have high employment due to university policies or due to the economic region in which they reside, or a combination of the two. As discussed in the interview section of this research post-graduation mobility is low among students in Ontario. It is possible that the universities presented are producing more employable students for the geographic region and that is why the cities are have low levels of millennial unemployment or it is also possible that universities may simply be luckily located in stronger economic areas and thus students are better off post-

graduation. Thus causation and correlation of the case studies is inconclusive. The case studies have been included in this research as they illustrate both a good overview of current and common policies already present in Ontario universities and show the wide range of policy options available. This information may also help universities in regions with high millennial under and unemployment to consider expanding their current policies to include more contact with other cities through strategic campus placement, coop opportunities and inter-regional exchanges.

Each university selected uses a variety of techniques to enhance the educational experience and employability of students post-graduation. The chart below indicates the most prevalent and accessible programs advertised at each university. This section will provide an introduction to each university used as a case study and will then outline the policies these universities are using.

5.1. Case Study Introductions

This study will review three universities that have high post-employment levels for millennials. The first is Laurentian University, it is a medium sized university located in the northern city of Sudbury Ontario and offers a wide range of comprehensive undergraduate programs, from mining to midwifery to engineering. The school has recently expanded to a satellite campus in Barrie Ontario and has included another twelve hundred students. The university has the highest post-employment rates in the province, with 92% of students working in their field within six months and 95% within two years. The university with the second highest post-graduate employment rates is Brock University. The university focuses on providing a multitude of cross-disciplinary and multidisciplinary degrees as well as providing one of the largest coop programs in the country. The third university selected as a case study is the University of Ottawa, ranked as a top research university. Each of these universities offers a multitude of resources to both students and alumni which will be explored in the following sections.

5.2. Student Career Planning/ Support Centers

Most universities across the province offer fully accessible career planning and support centers. Each one of the universities researched in this study has a complex array of services available through their respective centers, each offering a differing focus to enhance student employment. This section will outline some of the unique characteristics of their centers.

Laurentian University focuses on the wellness and roundedness of its students within its career center (University L. , Counselling and Support, n.d.). Career facilities include counselling and support for areas such as self-esteem and mental health while looking for employment, in addition to generalized career help. Some of the most basic career assistance offered by Laurentian comes from the Counselling and Support Services that offer a wide range of individual programs, ranging from career planning and academic skills to workshops in stress management (University L. , Counselling and Support, n.d.). The Career and Employment Center offers generalized support with “job postings, on-campus jobs, internship opportunities, career fairs, employment counselling, as well as, resume, cover letter and interview workshops, and resume Critiques”. The university has experimented with a variety of student services and has brought in alternative, student endorsed activities such as puppy therapy (University L. , Counselling and Support, n.d.); while not directly helping employability, it demonstrates their dedication to student support. The university tackles student employment as a holistic endeavor; dedicating facilities to creating job opportunities and employment skills in addition to supporting the personal development of the students. Laurentian University’s whole student approach to post-graduate employment is important to understanding what the university is doing well in. Laurentian university recognizes the specific stress, phobias and missing interpersonal skills that students may have in gaining employment support. Finding a career after graduation includes developing the soft skills and confidence to go after the job in addition to learning how to write a cover letter (University L. , Counselling and Support, n.d.).

The Career Center available at Brock offers a range of student supports including basic resume and cover letter writing in addition to helping individual programs with

particular industry related necessities, like portfolio creation (University B. , Career Services, n.d.). The literature points to a continuing difficulty for humanities and fine arts students in employment, however Brock takes particular care in developing industry related career skills like professional portfolios, individual interview preparation and personal evaluation profiles (University B. , Career Services, n.d.). Brock University implements a range of tools from online preparation courses, group style workshops and individual training and critiquing (University B. , Career Services, n.d.).

Career support centers have shown to be vital to pre-labour market research and basic career preparation skills in both the literature and in the interviews. Laurentian and Brock University have brought together additional services and attention to specific areas of need for their students. The case study clearly showed that having an accessible career center could be an important aspect to post-graduation student employment.

5.3. Bilingual and ESL Integration

Canada's bilingual and multi-cultural population opens up both challenges and opportunities for alumni after graduation. Two of the universities studied, Ottawa and Laurentian University, provided bilingual support in their universities and services. The universities do more than just offer French courses but make a concerted effort to integrate a cultural and language focus to their universities, offering French and English programs for a variety of backgrounds (University L. , Laurentian University is the first bilingual university to be recognized under the French Language Services Act, 2014) (Ottawa, n.d.).

Laurentian University (LU) features some of the most innovative language programs across the province, welcoming both Francophone and Anglophone speakers and offering international student language preparation (University L. , Top 10 Reasons to Choose Laurentian, n.d.). These programs are open to all languages and encourage learning Francophone, Anglophone and First Nations culture. Laurentian University takes pride in offering fully integrated French programs as well as French learning courses for Anglophones hoping to diversify their language skills (University L. ,

Language Institute Programs, n.d.). This allows students to become fully bilingual in both official languages, as well as allows for a multitude of language options for students that are coming out of immersion high schools. The university recently signed a contract with a local French college, Collège Boréal, to allow easier transition and transferring of credits for Francophone speaking students (University L. , New opportunities for French-speaking students, n.d.). This increases the ability of Francophone students to transfer into the university seamlessly. The University of Ottawa has created an entire institute to accommodate language preferences and add in intensive programs for students of either a Canadian or an international background (Ottawa, n.d.). These programs are designed much like Laurentian's offering both intensive and compressed programs as well as ongoing courses for students.

Both the University of Ottawa and Laurentian University focus on international students learning English for the first time. One advertisement states: "Laurentian University offers international students a unique academic experience: outstanding student support, multiple levels of entry, flexible starting dates, small class sizes, qualified and experienced teachers, innovative programming, and transition and bridging programs for undergraduate and graduate students. Special programs such as an intensive language summer program and a unique summer outdoor adventure experience camp are also offered" (University L. , Language Institute Programs, n.d.). This fully supported ESL program integrates the cultural aspects of Ontario into the experience, increasing the likelihood that students will feel comfortable and understood during future employment.

Emphasis on bilingualism and language training is a key aspect of post-graduation employment options. Research collected during interviews suggests a strong correlation between language skills and the ability to find employment. One interview participant noted the increased mobility that students have once they are bilingual, while another pointed to the fact that some cities had a large ESL population that needed to be supported. What became clear during the interviews was the increased opportunities that alumni had if they were given skills to be more mobile in their job search, were able to communicate clearly, and demonstrated good interpersonal skills. These universities

provided a platform for language and cultural interactions that may have increased their students prospects in the labour market.

5.4. Strong Alumni Support: Social Networking & Mentoring

All of the universities included in the case study have a strong level of support for students, both pre-graduation and post-graduation. Each university supports alumni in differing ways; but all of them included some level of social net working with other alumni. As indicated by both research and the interviews, alumni social capital is of utmost importance in finding suitable employment post-graduation. All of the universities investigated for this research have a full range of social capital building opportunities as well as integrated mentoring programs. The universities in this research focus on three main ways to connect students to a social network: continuing on campus employment preparation and support, after graduation networking and employment postings, and finally alumni mentoring programs.

Building social capital can be an important part of finding meaningful work (America). Networking activities between past and recent graduates may create opportunities to meet other graduates in the field and better understand what steps to take towards a chosen career path. The Laurentian University states that, “from CEOs of multi-national organizations to our newest graduates, we are proud of their successes. After all, they were students first and are alumni, forever” (University L. , Alumni, n.d.). All of the universities utilizes a variety of social media outlets to connect alumni with each other; including Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. This gives students a medium to find other alumni even if they are not able to physically attend networking events (Association, n.d.). These events help millennials long after their graduation ceremony and allows them to become involved in parallel and differing industries to open up their options for employment.

Each of the Universities utilized mentoring differently, but each one combined some or all of the differing mentoring options: mentoring between alumni (new graduate with established professional), new graduates mentoring new students, language mentors, alumni mentoring students. Brock University is an excellent example:

mentoring online and in person, through its online mentor- match website (University B. , Mentorship Plus , n.d.). Mentors are faculty, alumni and community members affiliated with the university. The “online-dating” style website allows students and recent alumni to meet mentors and social network among people in their field. This gives students the opportunity to develop soft skills and build social capital before graduation. In addition it keeps alumni post-graduation in contact with the student community building another bridge to student- community bonds.

Supporting current students and recent graduates through the difficult transition period into the labour market is facilitated through these social capital building opportunities, especially mentoring. Both the literature and interviews suggests a requirement for students to learn more about their future careers and build contacts with the labour market as this may open many opportunities (America).

Brock and Ottawa both offer extensive early career planning services. Research suggests that students are not planning their career paths, but instead are taking courses that they enjoy (Geobey, 2013) . This was reinforced during the interviews as a key career development issue among millennials. Both of these universities included services that enabled students to explore career options and gain a good understanding of their educational investments desirability for the labour market.

Brock is enabling students to grasp how education is preparing them, and is designing tools for them to understand what steps are needed to meet their career goals (University B. , Career Assessment Tools, n.d.). This is a vital gap in knowledge that has been recognized though much of the literature on improving millennial employment. Brock University has created a multitude of digitally accessible and hands on activities to empower students to take future careers seriously and prepare for the labour market in concrete ways. In addition to their three main portals for exploring career options, Brock offers resource listings to over 120 different job, volunteering, and experiential work programs online which are provided by third party sources (University B. , Career Assessment Tools, n.d.). The most accessible tool Brock has available is the “Career Zone” online that assists students with understanding what jobs are available with the degree they are pursuing (University B. , Career Services, n.d.). This online catalyst

allows current students to create realistic goals about how to use their skills and education as well as what other education or skills may be required. This program is also useful for understanding current labour market standards as they evolve.

“Career Cruising” helps students who are having difficulty narrowing down their area of interest and guides them into looking at career options and at what they want out of the degree (University B. , Career Assessment Tools, n.d.). Occupational research allows students to look at career options, the employability rates and average wages for a given area of study. It gives them a clear and honest look at what they are getting into and what they want to get out of the degree.

The University also offers a “Spotlight” resource link for students in addition to job listings (University B. , Career Services, n.d.). These employers regularly employ Brock students both pre-graduation and post-graduation. This allows students to get an insider look at the office environment and workplace values. This digital resource also allows student to gain an idea of which companies are hiring at the moment and provides a clear link between employers and prospective employees.

These online support services, in addition to other third party digital resources, allow current millennials to have clear and realistic goals for their education, as well as helps them move into areas that they may be more interested in before graduation. The online nature of the support means that students have accessibility to this service 24 hours a day, and may come back multiple times to do research throughout their time in university. Additionally, these services are available to students post-graduation. Because of this, under employed millennials are able to look at other career options with their degrees, they may realize they need more education or more experience. These resources prepare students at Brock University by giving them a clear perspective of the labour market and what salaries to expect. Research clearly reported a trend of student misinformation and elevated expectations among students and employers (Friese, 2012). These resources allow for greater clarity and greater access to jobs for millennials graduating into the labour market.

The University of Ottawa offers an incredibly comprehensive Career Center giving students the opportunity to begin developing their careers from first year through

post-graduation. The center offers a variety of research tools, career finding skills and events to attend.

Providing a variety of research tools for career exploration can give an immense amount of awareness to students. The University of Ottawa provides a variety of online and in person consultations for students to discuss and explore future career options. These resources are specified for general students, those with international roots and prospects and for students with disabilities. The career exploration utilizes Psychometric Assessments, both online and in person workshops. These tests are created to first look at personal goals and interests, and secondly to look at individual abilities and skills (Ottawa, SASS, n.d.). The assessments are unique in that they allow students to reflect on many aspects of preparing for a career, they are also available post-graduation for alumni. The University also provides a variety of career exploration tools online to review possible labour market options and review wages for each sector (University B. , Career Assessment Tools, n.d.). The use of career exploration helps millennials review what they are expecting from the labour market before they graduate, as well as after.

The Career Development Center provides a variety of employment skill building, teaching how to utilize both new and traditional job searching skills. These include the most basic concepts of employment writing, to soft skills such as cold calling (University O. , n.d.). The center also teaches basic employment search etiquette such as writing thank you letters and asking for feedback (University O. , n.d.). Some of these most basic labour market skills are what provide the best foundation for finding a job in a competitive labour market.

Finally the Career Center offers a variety of events for pre-graduation and post-graduation millennials. They offer these fairs for many levels of employment, from short term summer employment to career fairs that are dedicated to graduating students and alumni. These offer a range of opportunities throughout the university experience to find employment and coop positions.

5.5. Work Experience Programs

All of the universities included in this study include extensive work experience programs and offer some of the most complex and integrated programs in the province. Each rate in the top five for coop programs. Below are examples from Brock University and the University of Ottawa, although Laurentian also includes a valuable coop program. Brock and Ottawa's work experience programs offer a much wider range of opportunities than afforded at other Canadian Universities. The literature and the interviews stressed the ongoing importance of work experience by the labour market (America). The alignment of these universities having top tier work experience programs and also having high post-graduation alumni employment may indicate a correlation of policy options for other universities.

Brock University offers one of the most comprehensive work experience programs in the country. The University offers the third largest coop program in Ontario which is expanded to include all faculties, a wide variety of internships and work placements, work-study financing, as well as a variety of opportunities to work abroad (University B. , Co-op Programs, n.d.). The large number of options for gaining experience in the student's field of work is a phenomenal way the university has been able to get such a large percentage of their post- graduation millennials into employment (University B. , co-op Programs, n.d.). The variety of options allows students to choose a program that fits with their goals and abilities; from full time coops that run semester long to work placements that are only a few days a week. Jobs are available both off campus in the private and public sectors, as well as on campus with a variety of student services and research projects. This not only generates the flexibility that allows students to engage throughout their educational time, but also allows students to experience a wide variety of career paths.

Literature suggests that work experience among recent post-graduate millennials is one of the single largest factors in employment. Brock University's policy of student employment is a critical factor in their post-graduation student success. The students not only gain direct experiences and skills that can be added to a resume, but also

allows them to learn soft skills, confidence in the career searching process, and gain social capital (America).

The University of Ottawa also offers extensive coop programs in both official languages. This work experience program allows students to find positions and experience. The dual language nature of the program opens up the doors to multiple government positions and private sectors. Because of language options available through the University coop students are also able to find coop positions in other parts of country. The University of Ottawa currently holds the position of second largest coop program in Ontario and fifth in Canada (Ottawa, C-operative Education Programs, n.d.). The program allows for a wide variety of faculties to become involved, with over 2, 200 students participating in the 2013 school year. In addition to the bilingual availability, the program also has 97 coop positions available abroad, opening up multiple international experiences for students. Literature of millennial student employment points towards labour market experiences as a key factor in millennium employability, which the University of Ottawa certainly offers to their students (America).

5.6. Community Engagement

Brock University was the only university to focus on a community approach to learning and living while attending the campus (University B. , Community Engagment, n.d.). Community engagement is complex as it offers opportunities to social network, gain work-like experience and to find new and meaningful career paths. As stated previously in the literature as well as the interviews, gaining all or any of these opportunities is a positive step in the labour market (Adams, 2011). Some literature suggest that volunteering can be a huge benefit to millennials while competing for jobs. This may suggest some correlation between university policies on community engagement and later employment levels of alumni.

Brock University encourages students to become active citizens in the local community (University B. , Community Engagment, n.d.). Opportunities to get involved in a variety community projects, mentorship programs and volunteer positions is a central vision of the universities “well rounded” student. The university offers a “PLUS”

program which awards certificates and credit for participation in volunteering and mentorship among other opportunities (University B. , Community Engagment, n.d.). This means that student engagement in the community is noted, including hours, on graduating student transcripts. These opportunities can be the breakthrough point for millennials having difficulty breaking into the labour market due to a lack of experience, it may additionally count towards interpersonal skills by employers. Brock University states that its, “job is to help you understand how to get involved” and this commitment has been paying off with almost 65, 500 hours being committed to the local community by students last year (University B. , Community Engagment, n.d.). Brock’s policy on community engagement is a source of experience and post-graduation employment help.

Chapter 6.

Interview Key Findings

Four in-depth interviews were conducted with Ontario-based employment service workers with the purpose of identifying factors that would increase university alumni employment rates. Research participants were from across four urban centers with low millennial employment; this included Toronto, London, Oshawa and Windsor (Denette, 2012). Interviews were conversational in nature as they were semi-structured, but were guided by a set of questions (available in appendix), they lasted between 40 minutes and 90 minutes. Several key themes were identified from the interviews. Key findings are extrapolated from these themes with specific attention paid to the umbrella issues identified by all participants.

6.1. Self-Understanding

There is consensus among participants that the employment rates of millennials is a considerable problem in Ontario and that universities have the ability to affect the employment outcomes of alumni. One of the most common themes brought forward by the participants was students' lack of self-awareness and understanding of what their degrees are leading to. This section will identify three of the common factors that the employment services workers understood to be an issue in finding employment and will address what the participants saw as a direct factor in later under and unemployment.

6.1.1. Knowing Your Desired Lifestyle

All Interview participants identified the complexity of asking youth, the majority still being in their teens, to make a life investment of this magnitude. The decision to attend university factors in a variety of advantages and disadvantages, many of which

are incomprehensible to inexperienced and excited youth. Participants identified two separate types of students: those going to university doing degrees in subjects they detest due to long term employability and those students doing degrees that they enjoy without thought to employment.

One interviewee (#1989) suggested that students should be envisioning a lifestyle, not a career. This suggestion was based on the realities of a rapidly changing labour market, and youth that are aggressively following their inclinations in deciding what degree to take instead of considering their future expectations. He recommended that millennials need to realistically evaluate the lifestyle they want for both their career and their personal life in the near future, stating that this could be narrowed down much easier than a career path. He stated that students needed to reflect upon their values and what they wanted out of life. Additionally they require knowledge of income levels that are realistically available to the majority of people attaining that degree. What kind of working life will the degree lead to: would they be working in an office or outside, would it be "9 to 5" or shift based; and was the student going to be satisfied with the outcome? The interview participants noted this lack of understanding, and the lack of resources for students to make educated choices for long term career paths. Many students were completing degrees without considering the realities of working life.

Understanding what lifestyle may be expected from graduating with a specific degree track is supported in the case study of the most successful universities, that provide online career support that allows students to surf through common career paths, salaries, and work experiences attributed to certain degrees. The employment levels of universities that give students realistic expectations from the beginning seem to have higher employment rates later on. Students, clearly need to identify what their investments in education are leading to so they can better consider their options. Some main areas of consideration for universities to provide this understanding includes: data on labour market openings and changes, salary rates, employment area and rates according to degree, mentoring for students, and work experience.

6.1.2. Standards and Expectations

Expectations and Standards of students and employers is identified as an issue by the participants and is backed up by considerable literature. Hand in hand with envisioning lifestyle is student expectations. Three of the interview participants noted the clear disconnect between students and employers. According to the interview participants and the literature, students are expecting their degrees to lead them to highly desirable, well-paying and interesting jobs immediately after graduation (Friese, 2012). Employers on the other hand largely viewed graduates as lacking employable skills, yet according to these participants and the statistics, many employers are now requiring university degrees for jobs that did not require a post-secondary education only a decade ago. This contrast is due to what economists refer to as “signaling”. Signaling means that employers assume that people who complete university have an increased amount of skills; this is based on the assumption that it requires certain characteristics and skills to complete a university degree. This process of signaling is part of the disappointment that some employers may feel, as expectations of skills acquired during university may be overestimated. Two participants (#2039 and #2064) described how employers are now expecting their employees to be over educated and highly skilled before entering the work place. Another participant (#2014) pointed out the ever decreasing level of labour market training by employers, meaning that students are expected to be gaining this knowledge during their studies. This means that students are facing severe education inflation, yet are seemingly unaware of the market value of their skills. This again points to a need for better self-awareness by students and better provision of realistic expectations by universities.

6.1.3. Personal Branding and Reputation

What becomes more detrimental after graduation and for job searching is alumni unconsciousness of what they have to offer and how they are perceived by employers. Two of the participants (#1989 and #2064) identified a lack of self-understanding by students when looking for employment. Many students do not have a clear conception of what they are working towards while in university, and worse still, participants identified that students could not comprehend what they had to offer to employers after

graduation. Participant #1989 stated that students required an external personal brand and a reputation to do well; this requires students to identify their skills and attributes and also to somehow disseminate this knowledge to the labour market. This particular participant noted the lack of appropriate use of social media like Facebook, blogging and LinkedIn, many alumni were not utilizing these resources to make others aware of their availability and skills. This participant highlighted in the conversation the concept of students learning to “sell” their abilities and personal brand. There was an identification by all participants that student needed to learn job searching skills, which include this branding process. Two of the universities identified in the case studies have dedicated resources to helping students merge their online branding, resumes and interview skills to produce more clearly defined “packages” for employers to consider.

The interview participants all noted the considerable lack of self-awareness of millennials from the beginning of post-secondary through to career hunting. The interviewees noted that resources for students to become more realistic and aware are not always available or utilized fully at universities by students, and this leads to lower employment rates. Millennials lack of awareness of the labour market and their position within the work world became very obvious during the interviews. On a more personal level of employability was the identification by interview participants of millennial alumni and their lack of awareness in soft skill capabilities.

6.2. Soft Skills in the Generation Gap

Soft skills were identified by all participants as an area in need of improvement by millennial alumni looking for employment. Some participants seemed to think that alumni were simply lacking communication capabilities and other soft skills altogether. While other participants identified a changing dynamic in soft skills between generations. Participants identified three areas of soft skills that they observed to be most damaging to millennial graduates during their job hunting.

6.2.1. Multi-Generational Competition and Communication

Two participants (#2039 and #1989) extensively noted the multi-generational conflict that millennials are facing while in the labour market. Both participants noted the overwhelming competition that millennials are facing in the labour market due to the Baby Boomers extension of working life. Participants observed securing entry level jobs as a large issue for millennials; due to a variety of issues. The labour market is stagnating because baby boomers are not retiring and this is causing a ripple effect of lessening mobility. Furthermore, the participants noted the hostility and fear of the younger generations by Baby Boomers. The millennial generation has been brought up with differing communication techniques, and in technological understanding they are far advanced. Participant #1989 simply pointed out the fact that each generation is fearful of the ones that come after it. The participants clearly stated this as an issue for millennials finding employment, and this large age gap between millennials and baby boomers needs to be bridged.

Participants also noted the cultural and language differences among millennials and how it was viewed by employers. Participant #1989 observed that gendered communication in Ontario has changed over time and this has led to some confusion. He noted that men and women in the millennial generation speak similarly, both in manner and towards each other. He observed a marked difference in how millennial men interacted and how baby boomer men interacted. It was suggested that there seems to be a large miscommunication between age groups especially in inter-gendered work places as well as in what millennials are interested in talking about. The noting of this difference was not seen as an issue of millennials but as a barrier to communicating with employers.

6.2.2. Story Telling and Body Language

Three of the participants (#2064, #1989 and #2039) observed a failure among millennials to communicate their skills and have a confident and open body language when interviewing with employers. One interviewer (#1989) called this skill “story telling” and recommended students practice the skill of telling stories about themselves as this was a practice used among Baby Boomers. Participants observed a lack of ability to

give a clear summary of their skills and accomplishments. This relates back to the earlier observation that millennials had difficulties with self-awareness and personal branding. Literature provides recommendations for a three minute summary and the participants noted that students needed to work harder to have a positive and open attitude when responding to questions (Adams, 2011). Upon graduation students need to know and be able to conversationally answer what skills they have to offer a company. All three universities used as case studies in this research have extensive career services that all provided interview skills and practice for students. It seems clear that the addition of assistance with interview skills by a university can increase employment search skills post-graduation.

6.2.3. Social Capital

All Participants talked about social capital being of utmost importance when looking for work. This observation is backed up by the literature which summarizes it as being one of the most important characteristics to finding employment (Adams, 2011). The Participants noted that recent graduates did not have enough contacts with employers once they graduated, and that students from minority backgrounds or from less educated families often lacked this social support when looking for employment. Some universities reviewed here have programs to support minority communities, and this seemed to bring up their employment rates. Literature clearly points to social capital as a factor in employment (America). Unfortunately, the participants and the literature left vague suggestions on how to acquire or maintain these contacts. The universities studied in this research supported these students more, but also lacked teaching in hard techniques on building social capital.

According to research and the interviewees, social capital can be acquired through a variety of options including: volunteering, work experience, family connection, friends, fairs and events, and mentoring. The last option, mentoring, is offered by Brock University as a direct form of personal development and way to form a relationship with people working in a variety of fields. Mentoring was discussed by participants as a direct form of learning social skills and could be explored further by universities for assisting student employment.

6.3. Survival Jobs and Dream Jobs

Interviewees disagree on the type of work that students should be working towards while in post-secondary and after graduation. Two participants (#2039 and #2064) in particular have strong opinions about employability, both cite the possible downsides with taking a survival job as well as with holding out for a dream job. These questions of employment type are directly connected to student expectations and social capital. The jobs students hold after university can greatly impact their ability to find employment long term.

6.3.1. The Impact of Taking a Survival Job

Participants (#2039, #1989 and #2064) explored in depth the issues of taking a job that required an education level far less than a university degree or a job that was severely limited in hours. There seems to be mixed feelings about these jobs, as many participants noted the fact that post-graduation many millennials were carrying enormous loads of debt. This led many students to take jobs that were below their education level and not in their area of interest due to fear and a need to pay for their debts. Participant #2039 talked about how these jobs could make students feel inadequate, embarrassed and hopeless in finding employment. The literature suggests that confidence is important in gaining appropriate employment, and thus is pointing to the downward depression cycle that can occur with alumni struggling to find employment (Geobey, 2013) (Friese, 2012). Participant #2039 also notes the isolation that occurs with these millennials as they lose their social capital by taking these jobs, both through embarrassment and loss of frequent contact. On the other side, Participant #2064 notes that having large periods of unemployment also reflected badly for millennials. Consensus among the interviewees is that the six month mark seemed to be the grace period of acceptable underemployment or unemployment by employers. Working in a job requiring less education for this period of time was seen as positive for work ethics, being unemployed also was more acceptable for this length of time. However participants remarked that long periods of underemployment or unemployment could reflect badly on millennials looking for jobs.

6.3.2. The Impact of Holding Out for a Dream Job

Many students who have the option of holding out for a job that meets their expectations, stay unemployed or they may fill their time with alternate interests. Interviewees note that it is much easier to find employment if you are already employed, so holding out for a dream job may impair employment. As noted previously, all interview participants see issues with expectations for employment among recent graduates and participants remarked that although students should not sell themselves short, students also needed to be realistic. The literature also pointed out some of the unrealistic expectations of students looking for employment. In Ontario, most universities follow up with their alumni within six months of graduation to find out if they attained employment in their field. Thus we can hypothesize that the six month mark is an important indicator for those looking for employment, and that students should both reach for their dream jobs, while realizing they may need to take less desirable positions in their field.

6.3.3. Alumni Mobility

Willingness of alumni to move for work was observed as an issue among all interview participants, and was noted in the literature as a significant barrier to employment of millennials (Guy, 2014). All interview participants commented that different cities in Ontario offered diverse opportunities, with vast differences between large urban cities like Toronto and smaller cities that grew out of resource-based employment like steel mills. Participants noted that many students remained stuck in their “hometown” or their “university town” well after graduation. Interview participants note that some students gained degrees that have very few positions available in the limited local area, but that they could gain employment in other areas of the province or country quite easily. Interviewees drew conclusions such as not having contacts and support in other cities, and a general lack of social capital extending outside the local community as the reason students lack mobility in their job search. Successful universities that were reviewed in this research all had extensive provincial work experience, volunteer opportunities and exchange programs for their students. This could be a factor in levels of post-graduation employment.

6.4. The Labour Market and Indentured Students

Work experience was the most common indicator of alumni success in the literature, yet was also the most controversial aspect of the interviews with participants. Each interview brought forth issues and concerns with coops and internships, yet also supported them as it made alumni more able to find employment.

6.4.1. Complexities of Work Experience and the Labour Market

All interviewees were asked about work experience including: coops, internships, placements and volunteer work. All participants have mixed feeling about the ethics of these programs. There were three main concerns brought forward by participants about work experience: The first is the lack of appropriate pay, secondly the type of positions that students are taking on and finally the disadvantages of these programs for students of different socio-economic backgrounds.

Many participants were concerned that these work placements paid very little for the amount and level of work being completed. What the interviewees reveal is that a striking number of students are taking on an ever increasing number of work experience positions, many of them unpaid; this is resulting in fewer entry level jobs after graduation because companies are simply hiring students for substantially less pay. The participants noted that employers are placing students in jobs that were full time positions only a decade ago. These unpaid or poorly paid positions offer no benefits and often include no overtime for work that would have been considered full time and well paid employment only a few years ago. Interviewees were concerned over the morality of requiring adults to work for free for substantial amounts of time under the guise of it being an opportunity since there is clearly a point at which a position becomes an actual job. Current research cites accumulating complaints and legal complications in Canada over these students work experience positions, and universities have done little to protect students from these abuses (Cowan, 2014). Research suggests students are taking on these positions in the hope of finding “real employment” (Cowan, 2014). Unfortunately companies are taking on students for contracts with durations between four month to a year as a way of filling entry level positions for free or at a reduced cost

with no intention of providing students with future employment. Interview participants clearly see merit in taking on some work experience, but they made clear recommendations such as limiting the amount of hours, ensuring fair compensation for work and advising students in finding real employment. Overall Participants conveyed that they did not agree with the current set up of these university work experience positions, and thought that they needed to be revised.

The literature also points out that these placements create economic strain and disadvantage lower income families since placements cost money in tuition to the university and provide less money than other underemployment positions such as waitressing (Hertel-Fernandez, 2010). One participant pointed out the inequality of this, since families of higher income millennials are able to afford to support adult children during these placements while lower income students don't have this option. Literature suggest that this creates a class dichotomy where university students from lower income backgrounds are not able to accumulate professional type work experience or social capital from these work experience placements, further disadvantages them in the labour market after graduation (Hertel-Fernandez, 2010).

6.4.2. Labour Market Training and University Communication

Skills being acquired by university students are clearly not matching labour market demands, as stated in both the research and by the interview participants. These employment placements by universities do not seem to be mitigating the misalignment between skills acquired in university and those currently in demand by the labour market. Two participants notice the substantial difference in the labour market responsibility for training. They pointed out that employers are expecting qualified employees but have no interest in contributing to the training of employees. One participant (#1989) suggests the partnering of universities with employers to facilitate better employment placements but also to guarantee employment opportunities after graduation and help shape the universities current transparency with labour market expectations.

6.4.3. Subsidization by the Tax Payer

Participants involved in the interviews all came from non-profit, government funded organizations. This has been both a limitation and an advantage in the study. The most interesting aspect of the interviews was the funding that these organizations are providing to millennials post-graduation. All the participants involved in the research are part of organizations that help students to find employment placements (much like the university coops and internships). These organizations subsidize the employer for the wages of the millennials they hire for a probationary period. This means effectively that tax payers are paying the wages of millennials instead of companies that are getting their labour. It begs the questions of why employers are receiving free and cheap labour not only while millennials are in universities but well after they graduate. It would seem that the labour market simply does not want to pay for their employees and instead expects the tax payer to do so. None of the interview participants commented on the ethics of these work placements or compared them to the university placements which was also notable. The creation of these government subsidization programs clearly highlights the change in mentality of the labour market and the complacency that trusted institutions like universities and the government are taking.

Chapter 7.

Policy Options

This research may demonstrate that millennial employment levels can be positively impacted through strong university policies and active student participation. Millennials living and working in Ontario after graduating from university face a variety of labour market issues. Some of these limitations are well outside the control or influence of a university, but many others such as: a lack of labour market awareness and experience, unethical work experience placements, mobility issues and communication problems, can be mitigated during the undergraduate period. Increasing appropriate labour market participation is beneficial both for Ontario's long term socio-economic wellbeing but also for universities themselves as an increasing number of youth seek out education that leads to employable career paths.

Numerous policy options have been recommended from the research, case studies and expert interviews analyzed in this research. The policy options selected in this section for consideration are based on the frequency of their presence in the research as well as an assessment of efficacy in their ability to reduce under and unemployment of youth graduating from Ontario universities. Additionally, feasibility of implementation has been considered in the context of distinct university institutions. The key focus of these policy options are to enable upcoming university students to have increased employment options and appropriate labour market participation.

7.1. Ethical Work Experience Programs & Labour Market Partnerships

The first policy option addresses the concerns documented in the literature review and interviews about the impact of work experience programs. The policy option

seeks to address the main concerns with the current implementation of work experience programs used throughout the province and offer suitable suggestions for universities moving forward. This policy option proposes that universities should expand their current work experience programs so that more students can acquire labour market experience prior to graduation; additionally universities should require ethical levels of pay, hours and duration for employment. This policy also recommends the use of labour market partnerships with the university. This policy option is broken down to address each segment of this option more thoroughly below.

7.1.1. Increased Work Experience

The relevance of having work experience upon graduation was stressed in both the literature and the interviews (Wray, 2013). The literature pointed out that many students lacked experience in simply looking for work, but more important they lack experience in applying their skills to real world situations (Benes, 2012). The interviews pushed for greater amounts of ethical labour market experience. It proposes that universities greatly increase the level of student work experience programs and open them to all faculties. This policy replicates the policies delivered by the universities used in the case studies as each university had large and efficient work experience programs and high post-graduation employment rates.

7.1.2. The Ethical Employment of Youth

A major concern brought forward by the interview participants was the unethical nature of many student placements across Ontario. There are many issues: low to no wages for professional level work, long hours, as well as multiple and long term placements with the same company with no chance of real employment. The basic concern by participants was the use of students to fill long term, full time positions for little to no wages instead of hiring a full time, entry level graduate. This policy option requires universities to insist on paid positions for internships, coops, and work placements, at a level of \$15 or higher after the second year of university. This is based on literature looking at a basic livable wage in the province and value of the work being done (Hertel-Fernandez, 2010). Students completing post-secondary education have a

right to fair and ethical pay for their labour. \$15 is still a relatively low wage for well-educated adults completing professional work, but still remains an opportunity for companies looking to take on cheaper labour by less experienced workers.

The duration of work experience placements needs to be clearly monitored and limited by universities. Both the literature and the interview participants noted a concern with employers extending placements for several terms: essentially using students to fill an entry level job (Hertel-Fernandez, 2010). This policy option recommends that universities pay close attention to institutions offering long term coop or internship positions and ensure that their students are not delaying graduation or working over 37.5 hours per week with a specific employer. The point of a work placement is to gain work experience, not fill a long term position for the company. This could be done with university supervision and limiting coop duration to appropriateness with the degree program being offered by the university.

7.1.3. Labour Market Participation

Having input and cooperation with local businesses can ensure that students are gaining applicable skills during their time with the university and also opens up further work experience and career positions. The interview participants noted the lack of mobility of millennials post-graduation. Many students have grown up and will continue to live in the local area after completing their education. University cooperation with small to large regional business could ensure that universities are tailoring course options to reflect requirements in the local labour market. This cooperation with the labour market could also lead to better social capital for students through organized conferences and work experience programs. All the universities included in the case study had tailored characteristics in the university to complement the local economy. For example the University of Ottawa's language institute complemented the regional economies influenced by French speaking employers and government work available locally (Ottawa, Official Languages and Bilingualism Institute, n.d.).

7.2. Complementary Skill Alternatives for Students

Creation of complementary skill options for students and more required courses are the second option that arises through the literature and interviews (Silva-Powell, 2012). The literature indicated that employers see students as lacking specific skills sets required for the work place, this was seen across literature looking at all degree types (Silva-Powell, 2012). This policy can be implemented in a number of ways that will be investigated below.

7.2.1. Increased Numbers of Required Courses

Universities across Ontario have differing sets of required courses for graduation. The simplest way for universities to implement change quickly for their students would be by changing graduation requirements. Literature highlighted students avoiding hard, but relevant courses for their degrees (Wray, 2013) (Kolm, 2013). Universities may simply make a larger number of “option” courses mandatory within a degree or may require students to take a greater variety of courses during university to create “more rounded students” as suggested by two of the interview participants.

7.2.2. Complementary Certificate Courses

Another option for universities is to offer complementary certificate courses. This is already achieved at a number of universities across the province, offering students certificates in transferable skills and inter-personal connections. Universities across Ontario currently offer certificates in everything from etiquette to software to leadership and teamwork. These types of skills are vital for the workplace but may not necessarily require or fit into a course at the university. The literature and interview participants clearly point to the need for transferable skills in Ontario’s changing and dynamic labour market (Silva-Powell, 2012). These additional certificate programs could be offered at a cost to the student or through additions to the career center.

7.2.3. Multi-Education Type Additions

Some universities in Ontario have begun partnerships with local learning institutions, usually the nearest college. These partnerships allow universities to attract more students through transfer credits and easier accessibility. Literature suggests that partnering applicable skills with work experience and theoretical knowledge is the best combination for alumni employment (America). Some universities such as Laurentian and Brock have begun full partnerships with colleges that allows students in some disciplines greater transferability between the two types of education. Common areas include social work and nursing; but are expanding to include other programs. This recommendation suggests the ongoing cooperation between universities and colleges to increase the work readiness of students.

7.3. Increased Student Awareness and Transparency Programs

The literature and interview participants identify overwhelmingly that students require greater knowledge of the labour market, the labour market desirability of their degree and their transferable skills (Geobey, 2013). Brock University provided the most complex and user friendly model of student awareness programs of the three universities. They provide in person help, and numerous online tools and resources to choose from. While Laurentian University uses a narrow but more individualized tailoring for students. The interview participants clearly state that students need clearer more precise knowledge of the labour market and more accessible data on current labour market trends. This policy recommendation includes creating online and individualized data for students to gain better access to labour markets, and putting further effort into researching the regional economy and labour market.

Chapter 8.

Criteria and Measures for Policy Options

The criteria and measures for this study were developed to assess the policy options and are based on a combination of the research findings, case study considerations and interview outcomes. This section will outline a description of each criteria and measure; the policy options are evaluated on the criteria, measures and scales outlined in Figure 8-1. The calculation of each criterion (Figure 8-2) has not been standardized, this is due to the fact that each policy option has specific variations and the subjective nature that would result for each option. The weight given to effectiveness has been tripled, this is to make sure universities implement to most effective changes for their students. The scores of each policy option will be totalled and rated as strong (average of 3), fair (average of 2), and weak (average of 1) in ranking. Please note that all three policy options would have a positive impact on millennial employment rates after graduation.

Table 8-1 Criteria and Measures

Criterion	Description	Measure	Scale
Effectiveness (X3)	The extent to which students are able to find appropriate work in their field of interest after graduation.	The percentage of students that find employment in their field of interest within 6 months of graduation.	3 = High 2 = Medium 1 = Low
Equity	Whether a policy positively effects students.	The number of student beneficiaries from vulnerable groups.	3 = High 2 = Medium 1 = Low
Financial	If the policy options are financially feasible for a university.	Estimates of the cost of implementing the policy option	3 = High 2 = Medium 1 = Low
Implementation Complexity	How complicated the policy option would be to implement and maintain.	The number of obstacles that would have to be overcome by the implementing authority	3 = High 2 = Medium 1 = Low
Stakeholder Acceptability	How students, faculty and staff would be impacted by the policy option.	The number of perceived acceptance issues by stakeholders	3 = High 2 = Medium 1 = Low

Table 8-2 Criteria Evaluation Matrix

Criterion	Policy Options		
	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
	Ethical Work Experience Programs & Labour Market Partnerships	Complementary Skill Alternatives for Students	Increased Student Awareness and Transparency Programs
Effectiveness (x3)	9	6	3
Equity	2	3	3
Budgetary Impact	2	2	3
Implementation Complexity	2	1	3
Stake Holder Acceptability	2	2	3
Total (out of 15)	17	14	15

8.1. Evaluation Matrix Findings

Option one received the highest overall score, this is largely due to the fact that it is the most effective policy option. Options two and three are extremely close in score, but rank differently in effectiveness. The highpoints of the ranking are discussed below.

8.1.1. Ethical Work Experience Programs & Labour Market Partnerships

This policy option ranked as the strongest in the criteria analysis overall. Ethical Work Experience and Labour Market Partnerships will be highly efficient because it is estimated that by directly increasing work experience and labour market contact for students, universities will also be indirectly tackling a number of other barriers students face such as job search skills, social capital and workplace awareness. The policy rated the lowest, but still in the fair range for equity. This was due to issues addressed earlier in the research citing that students from working-class families may find it harder to gain and afford coop positions, this has been mitigated in the policy option by requiring a minimum living wage for coop students. The budgetary impact and implementation complexity of policies is rated as fair, but is subjective as it is based on the work experience policies and programs already available at universities. An expansion of a well-run work experience programs may cost less, while a large change or the creation of a work experience program may cost a considerable amount for universities. The ranking was based on the fact that most Ontario universities offer work experience programs already, and that this policy would simply be expanding on these programs. This policy was rated fair for stakeholder acceptability. The majority of research for this study indicate an increased demand by students and the labour market for better preparedness. However, it is still important to note that some stakeholder will debate the place of work experience in an academic institution, as described in the literature review.

8.1.2. Complementary Skill Alternatives for Students

This policy option rated the lowest over-all but still provides an avenue for universities willing to take up the challenge of a more expensive and complex policy

change. The overall effectiveness ranking of this policy option is quite high, due to the fact that it would give students a variety of new transferable skills and accreditations that would be useful in the labour market. The option was also rated high for equity as all students could enroll and compete for positions in the courses and would be no more equity biased than current enrolment standards of the university. This policy rated the lowest in the criterion of budgetary impact and implementation complexity. This is due to the fact that the creation of new courses, college relationships, and accreditation types may be quite costly and take a large amount of administrative capacity. The process of creating something new is more difficult than revitalizing current policy and programs such as in policy one. The stakeholder acceptability of this policy option was rated fair and has the same stakeholder concerns as the first policy option.

8.1.3. Increased Student Awareness and Transparency Programs

This policy option ranked as the second best but was displaced due to the less effective nature of the policy. While student awareness and transparency programs are vital to later alumni employment, it may be hard to enforce and encourage students to use these programs. It is important to note that no information was available to support the effectiveness of these programs, mostly due so few universities making these available. Thus the ranking of effectiveness for this policy is somewhat subjective and future studies on the use of and effectiveness of these programs may be important at universities as they ranked high in every other category. This policy option provided the most equity as it provided students with multiple avenues of labour market awareness, was available to students prior to and during enrolment and there was no compulsory requirements or limit of use. This policy option also ranked high for budgetary and administrative complexity, this was due to the largely online nature of the information, and that a lot of these programs would simply be an expansion of current student service centers. This also ranked high for stakeholder acceptability as it had little effect on non-participating students, staff and faculty.

Chapter 9.

Policy Recommendation and Summary

This study recommends policy option one: Ethical Work Experience Programs & Labour Market Partnerships. The criteria analysis indicates that implementing this policy option could lead to an effective increases in alumni employability.

9.1. Recommended Implementation Strategy and Next Steps

Universities in Ontario already have the work experience programs in place to initiate progress towards implementing a policy that would address ethical models; however many will need to put in place further measures that could effectively connect employers with the university. It is recommended that universities implement a local labour market research analysis that will identify labour market trends in the region. Next universities should review current work experience programs and implement ethical practices such minimum coop wages and maximum hours.

Universities need to implement ongoing research consultations with their alumni in the region to continually improve and understand the impact of the work experience program on their students. This will identify unique local programming needs and preferences, furthermore it will provide indicators to help construct regionally appropriate targets for alumni employment. Future research is required to fully understand the labour market training needs and skills gaps to attaining employment after graduation. Finally, it important that universities converse and cooperate with their local labour market interests to allow students to be able to integrate into the local market.

9.2. Conclusion

Implementing the recommended policy options to improve work experience programs in universities and increase local labour market input can potentially increase alumni employment rates over time. Using a model of ethical work experience programs will help to improve equity and decrease labour market exploitation of students. Implementing ongoing research into recent alumni and labour market trends will give universities a clear standard of achievement. Each economic region performs differently, consideration of this will help universities set realistic employability goals for graduating students and identify current labour market standards.

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Appendix A.

Interview Topics and Questions

The Successful Alumni

Contact Numbers

Principal Investigator: Kassandra Westman,

[...]

Supervisor: Prof. Maureen Maloney, [...]

Department: School of Public Policy, Simon Fraser University

Director: Dr. Doug McArthur, [...]

This study will be used for a capstone project at Simon Fraser University in the Master of Public Policy program. The interview will be used for research purposes and information gathered will be published by the university library, and will be open for public viewing.

Introduction

This is a list of questions or topics that I propose to cover. You may choose to talk about any, all, or none these topics during the interview. If you have any suggestions or further comments please do not hesitate to let me know.

General Information

Can you please tell me a little about what you do in your job?

How many of your clients are millennials (aged 20-35)?

Experiences with Millennials

What are some of the main struggles millennials have looking for employment?

Do you see a difference in employability between university and college graduates?

What skills or experiences do you consider the most important for finding employment?

- Basic computer skills
- Resume/cover letter writing
- Participation in co-op or internships
- Language skills

General Comments on specific issues

What barriers do millennial graduates face in finding employment and how can they best overcome these?

Have you encountered any employability barriers based on the following:

- Urban versus rural universities
- Ability or willingness to move for work
- Social or economic background of the alumni
- Gender or racial or other minority differences

Do you see the employment of undergraduate students as being of concern to the general population?

Policy Options for Universities

How do you think compulsory coops/ internships may help employability after graduation?

How important is building social capital before a person graduates?

What are your feelings on regulating the number of students going to university?

What are your feelings on integrating college degrees/ skills into a larger number of universities? (for example taking a BA History degree at the university with a minor in Paralegal Studies at the college)

Do you have any comments about options I may have missed?

Thank you for participating in this interview.

Please feel free to contact Cassandra Westman with any questions you may have!