

Stakeholder Summary

Students Who Delay Entering Postsecondary Education Not Hurt in Labour Market

An increasing number of students are delaying their entry into postsecondary education (PSE) and a new study by the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) finds that delaying had no significant impact on the performance of graduates once they enter the labour market. The study found that students who delayed attending PSE fared just as well as direct entrants in most measures including unemployment rate, working in a job related to their field of study, being overqualified for their job and annual earnings.

However, delayers, especially those with a long delay, make different program choices than direct entrants. Delayers were more likely to attend college, and those who did go to university were more likely to enrol in liberal arts programs.

Project Description

Postsecondary Education Latecomers: Profile and Labour Market Outcomes of Ontario PSE Graduates uses data from Statistics Canada's National Graduates Survey and Follow-up Survey of Graduates, complemented by data from Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey. The data include cohorts between 1982 and 2005. The study examines the demographic profile of delayed entrants, their program choices and their labour market performance. Delayers were separated into two categories, short delayers and long delayers, based upon their age at the time they obtained their first PSE credential.

Findings

In Ontario, delayers tended to be first-generation (graduates whose parents have no PSE) or Aboriginal, groups who are traditionally underrepresented in higher education. This was especially true of long delayers. In the cohort of 2005, 44% of long delayers were first-generation students, which is 20 percentage points higher than direct entrants. Also, the percentage of delayed entry graduates whose first language was neither English nor French grew from between 5-15% in the 1980s to 15-25% in the cohorts of 2000 and 2005.

Compared to their university counterparts, delayed entry college students' choice of program was more diverse. Short delayers made program choices similar to direct entrants, while long delayers were more likely to study health, computers, architecture and engineering. They were also less likely to study education or physical and biological science programs.

While their overall labour market performance was not significantly different than direct entry graduates, the study did find that long delayers who graduate from college were more likely to be completely out of the labour force at five years after graduation.

Due to the growth in the number of students delaying entry to PSE and the province's overall attainment goals, the author argues that delayers cannot be considered a marginal group in Ontario's higher education system and should be of great interest to policy makers.

Postsecondary Education Latecomers: Profile and Labour Market Outcomes of Ontario PSE Graduates was written by Shuping Liu, Research Analyst for the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.