

Stakeholder summary

Graduate students not happy with guidance on employment opportunities after graduation

Data from the 2013 Canadian Graduate and Professional Student Survey (CGPSS) show that while graduate students are satisfied with the general aspects of their programs and their student experience, they are not when it comes to career preparation. According to a new report from the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO), graduate students are not satisfied with the quality of advice and workshops related to employment after graduation.

Project description

Using data and opinions collected from the 2013 and 2010 cycles of the CGPSS, *Students Weigh In: National Analysis of Results from the 2013 Canadian Graduate and Professional Student Survey* evaluated how satisfied students were with their program and student experience, how students financed their studies and expected levels of debt, as well as their satisfaction with the supports and training they received on professional skills development. Results were compared across region, university size, year of study, discipline, international status and gender.

The CGPSS was administered at 48 universities across Canada and more than 51,000 students took part.

Findings

Master's students in professional programs were more likely to rate their professional development positively compared to students in research streams. Graduate students in research programs were particularly dissatisfied with the advice and workshops they received on careers both inside and outside of academia. This finding varied across discipline, with STEM and health sciences students more satisfied than social sciences and humanities students. Overall, satisfaction decreased by year of study as employment after graduation became more relevant.

Less than 45% of graduate students reported using their career services and of those who did, less than 70% reported their experience positively. Use varied across discipline, with engineering students more likely to access their career centres than students in other disciplines. International students were also more likely to use career services than domestic students.

While two-thirds of graduate students consider finances to be an obstacle to their academic progress, a large proportion said that they were able to meet their financial requirements and many did not expect to accrue any additional debt during their studies. However, about 4% of students, particularly those in master's professional business and management programs, expected to accrue debts of \$50,000 or more.

Similar to career services, less than 50% of graduate students visited their financial aid offices and of those who did, less than 70% were satisfied with their experience.

Recommendations

There is considerable variation in student satisfaction across disciplines. The authors suggest that graduate schools and individual departments should implement policies and programs targeted to specific groups of students and that particular attention be made to the alignment between student expectations and professional skills development.

The authors also propose that career and financial services be adjusted or expanded to better meet the needs of graduate students. Students, in turn, should be aware of the benefits of these services.

Students Weigh In: National Analysis of Results from the 2013 Canadian Graduate and Professional Student Survey was written by HEQCO researchers Hillary Arnold and Carrie Smith.