

Learning to Earning | Higher Education and the Changing Job Market Session Summary

**Civic Ballroom
Sheraton Centre Toronto
123 Queen Street West, Toronto, M5H 2M9**

Thanks to Ian Hartlen and Adrian Philp, recent graduates from the Master of Public Policy Program at the University of Toronto, for their work in summarizing the conference.

Day One | Thursday, November 1, 2012

Session 3B | The college and university undergraduate student experience

Facilitator: Pamela Gravestock, University of Toronto

Megan O'Neill, University of Toronto
The Value of Extra-Curricular Involvement

Should we assign grades to extra-curricular involvement?

Drawing on social capital theories, extra-curriculars have the potential to build crucial networks of trust and engagement. Growing class sizes mean that students have an increasingly difficult time developing such networks in the classroom. Extra-curriculars provide the opportunity to acquire essential but otherwise unattained skills.

Also, increased social capital is correlated with greater labour market opportunity. Employers tend to agree with this assessment. The soft skills acquired through extra-curricular activity show strong influence on success in interviews and can also be viewed as an important element of education ROI. Students involved in the university community report greater satisfaction with the friendships and overall educational experience.

In sum, extra-curricular activities are no longer extra. Rather, we should see them as an underused vehicle for imparting skills and preparing students for the labour market.

Shaun McCracken, Georgian College

Students expect that when they leave their programs there will be a job for them. So what are policy makers and institutions doing to provide an adequate ROI for students?

An update to the credit transfer system would have a much needed impact for students in this area. If we could establish a more universal credit transfer system in Ontario, we could effectively reduce the financial burden on transfer students. What now might take five years across two institutions could be reduced to three. With Canadian student debt at 14 billion dollars, reducing this burden is directly correlated to the ability of new graduates to seize labour market opportunities.

Diversifying learning strategies can complement this process. An increased online presence will allow more flexible access for part-time and mature students.

Ultimately, students expect to receive value for their investment in education and institutions need to respond accordingly.

Jennifer Gerard, Mohawk College

The presentation took the form of a personal anecdote on the speaker's own path through higher education. With various twists and turns in her academic career, she emphasized how the peer helper program at the University of Guelph was vital in her decision to stick it out and finish her bachelor's degree. The program coupled her with a senior student, creating a point of contact for academic and social mentorship. We need to realize that higher education can be a daunting and potentially isolating experience for students, and that fostering success needs to extend outside of the classroom. With rising numbers of mental health cases on our campuses, she drew particular attention to programs like this as way to reach out to students in need.

In addition, she suggests more flexible pathways to degree completion, including a greater online presence and an emphasis on instilling priorities in our students. We need to be open to and trust student's goals, while also providing a variety of paths to success. Collaboration between institutions will be the most crucial factor in establishing such a system.