

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 Two | Friday, November 2, 2012

Session 5A | Institutional supports for learning and labour market outcomes

Facilitator: Liwana Bringelson, Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities

Steve Joordens, University of Toronto

Joordens began by explaining that his favourite learning outcome is critical thinking and that critical thinking often requires provocation, which he promises to deliver in his presentation. He does so by questioning the entire focus of the conference, letting his opinion be known; these conferences are a bad idea, according to him. He is bothered by the word “jobs.”

The focus on jobs is the result of several factors. First, it is the desire on the part of students and their parents for independence and therefore employment following PSE, and PSE does indeed tend to enhance job opportunities. The problem is compounded by the fact that governments and political parties, naturally seeking election, will tend to want to do whatever is popular. This can conflict with their desire to make positive, though not necessarily popular, changes. The easiest thing to do in seeking election regarding educational policy is to agree with parents and students and focus education on jobs. “Learning to earning” is what results.

Universities are not, and should not be, merely job-training institutes. They exist to promote intellectual growth. Joordens reminds us that there are many decisions we make through life that have little or nothing to do with jobs. University education prepares an individual not just for a job, but for life.

Joordens recommends avoiding the marginalization of the goals of universities, especially as academic freedom, tenure, and the longevity of universities relative to governments means that universities can simply refuse to cooperate with jobs-focused initiatives. Instead of focusing so much on market outcomes, skills for life should be the focus. Rather than just being employable, graduates should also be better thinkers and better people.

Ruth MacKay, Humber College

Employer satisfaction with essential employability skills

Students say the reason they are attending PSE is to get a job. Mackay makes the distinction between universities and colleges, the latter historically being more focused on preparing students for the job market.

Students need a mix of job-specific skills and essential employability skills. Vocational learning outcomes and basic skills are specified in educational program standards.

Two provincial KPI surveys provide data. It is possible to map essential employability skill categories against employers' perceptions of graduates' skills and abilities. Areas of highest and lowest employer satisfaction are highlighted.

It is admitted that there are many different ways to analyze this data. Better use of the data would entail both institution-level and system-level analyses. Lack of consistent terms and definitions is an obstacle.

Wendy Cukier, Ryerson University

Entrepreneurship education and the culture of innovation

What is innovation? What are strategies for innovation? Innovation is usually associated with gadgets and start-ups. However, the most opportunities are in process innovation. Cross-sectoral processes are what's really interesting!

Encouraging innovation of all kinds means encouraging entrepreneurship. The problem is that most research on educating for entrepreneurship focuses on description rather than on measurement or impact assessment.

Currently, there is not enough of a reward system in place for innovation. We need to encourage collaboration between communities, markets, industry, government and education to remedy this. Examples of this kind of collaboration include the Digital Media Zone (DMZ) established by Ryerson University in 2010. The DMZ has already shown preliminary positive results including global recognition, incubation of start-ups and the creation and fostering of hundreds of jobs.

Further analysis of long-term impacts is needed. Suggestions for the future include greater focus on building a "culture of innovation," fostering entrepreneurship and working further upstream to engage young people.

Keith Hampson, Alston Road Group

Online learning is increasingly popular, as is online registration. The question is, how well can colleges and universities do online education?

There are very real limits to how well online education can be done given the way educational institutions currently operate. Any improvements to instructional value will be incremental. These limits

don't necessarily stand in the way of other kinds of educational organizations and these outsiders will play an increasingly larger role.

There is a wide gap between what we had imagined would be possible, and what we have by way of online education. Expectations were high early on. One of these expectations was reduced cost. However, what is common is little more than online versions of old correspondence courses. The technology is not being utilized to its full potential.

The obstacle is not a lack of knowledge about how people learn, neither is it a lack of sufficient technology. Rather, the business model of educational institutions is blamed. The overarching framework of what can and cannot be done in delivering value to stakeholders is not designed to fully leverage technology. For example, educational institutions have an interest in making it appear that the courses they offer are unique. In reality, it is likely that large class sizes and standardized curriculums mean that student experiences in many courses will be uniform regardless of which institution offers them.

Also, the exclusive and closed nature of education in the face of social media and a lack of private sector cooperation are serious challenges to be overcome.

The odds are stacked against established organizations making changes to their business models but incremental changes are possible. Some are already happening.

The educational establishment must recognize and respond to the limits of its own business model. Other private sector learning organizations are unconstrained by the higher business model and will only continue to fill the gap.