

WE WORK HARD FOR OUR MONEY

*Student Employment and the
University Experience in Ontario*

*The 2014 What Students Want
Report Series*

OUSAA

Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance

ABOUT OUSA

OUSA represents the interests of over 140,000 professional and undergraduate, full-time and part-time university students at seven institutions across Ontario. Our vision is for an accessible, affordable, accountable and high quality post-secondary education in Ontario. To achieve this vision we've come together to develop solutions to challenges facing higher education, build broad consensus for our policy options, and lobby government to implement them.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In November 2013, the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA) asked students to comment on their experience with summer and in-study employment. Of particular interest were: the number of jobs students were working during these terms; whether or not these opportunities were within a student's field of study; and whether they positively impacted their academic performance.

Results of OUSA's 2013 Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey (OPSSS) were further broken down based on institution and field of study for questions of particular interest. This was done to easily compare the responses from these distinct groups to see how consistent the undergraduate employment experience was across academic disciplines and universities.

From these results, OUSA found that many students are able to successfully find summer employment, and on average earn above minimum wage. However, many students who are employed during the summer are not working in positions related to their field of study, although this can differ widely depending on a student's faculty.

Additionally, many students indicated that they would increase the number of hours they worked over the summer, if further employment opportunities were presented.

Survey results also indicated that high numbers of students were also undertaking paid employment in-study: although the number of students working in areas related to their field of study remained low, and varied widely by program.

INTRODUCTION

The 2013 Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey (OPSSS) is the third in a series of biennial surveys conducted by the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance. These surveys ask undergraduate and professional students across Ontario a series of questions regarding several important aspects of student life at university, including cost, available resources, and their educational experiences.

2013's survey was answered by nearly 9,000 students from across the province, and provides those of us in the post-secondary system, and beyond, with important insights into their challenges and priorities. OUSA will be releasing a series of reports on our findings from the survey in the hopes that the resulting discussion can positively influence those students through meaningful discussion and public policy.

The Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance is a not-for-profit research and advocacy organization representing more than 140,000 students through their local student associations. OUSA works with its seven member organizations to provide educated solutions to students' concerns in the areas of quality, accountability, accessibility and affordability in Ontario's public universities.

SUMMER EMPLOYMENT

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For many students, summer jobs represent an important feature of their undergraduate experience. Not only are summer jobs a valuable source of income for students, they also provide an opportunity to develop important workplace skills that will be beneficial once they begin to transition from post-secondary into the workforce. These work placements are thus integral to a student's ability to finance and learn from their time at university, and OUSA recognizes the value of these positions for students.

Of the 8,220 domestic students surveyed, just under 55 per cent indicated that they had worked one job over the 2013 summer months, while 19 per cent reported having worked more than one summer job. Thus, 74 per cent of all respondents had one or more summer jobs in 2013. The remaining 26 per cent stated that they did not work during the summer.

When analyzed by population, some significant differences in summer employment patterns emerged, as outlined in the table below:

FIGURE 1: PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WORKING 1 OR MORE JOBS IN THE SUMMER, BY POPULATION TYPE

Low-Income Students	91%
Rural Students	83%
First Generation Students	74%
Aboriginal Students	73%
Students with Disabilities	72%
Students with Dependants	63%

91 per cent of all low-income students reported having one or more summer jobs, which perhaps unsurprisingly indicates a higher financial necessity to pursue work for this group of students.

Students with dependants reported the lowest levels of summer employment, with just 63 per cent of this group reporting working. This can perhaps be attributed to caring responsibilities – particularly

over the summer period when children are also on break from school.

The slightly lower summer employment rate of Aboriginal students and students with dependants may also be attributable to social factors. Aboriginal students are also more likely to have dependants or family care obligations than other groups of students: research has shown that 45 per cent of Aboriginal students spend time on dependant care responsibilities compared to 23 per cent of non-Aboriginal students.¹ Aboriginal peoples also have experienced lower levels of employment than the general population: while the employment gap narrows for Aboriginal students with a bachelor's degree (79 per cent compared to 81.6 per cent for non-Aboriginal degree holders), gaps grow wider at the lower levels of education.² Systemic barriers to employment may be impacting Aboriginal students in their search for summer jobs.

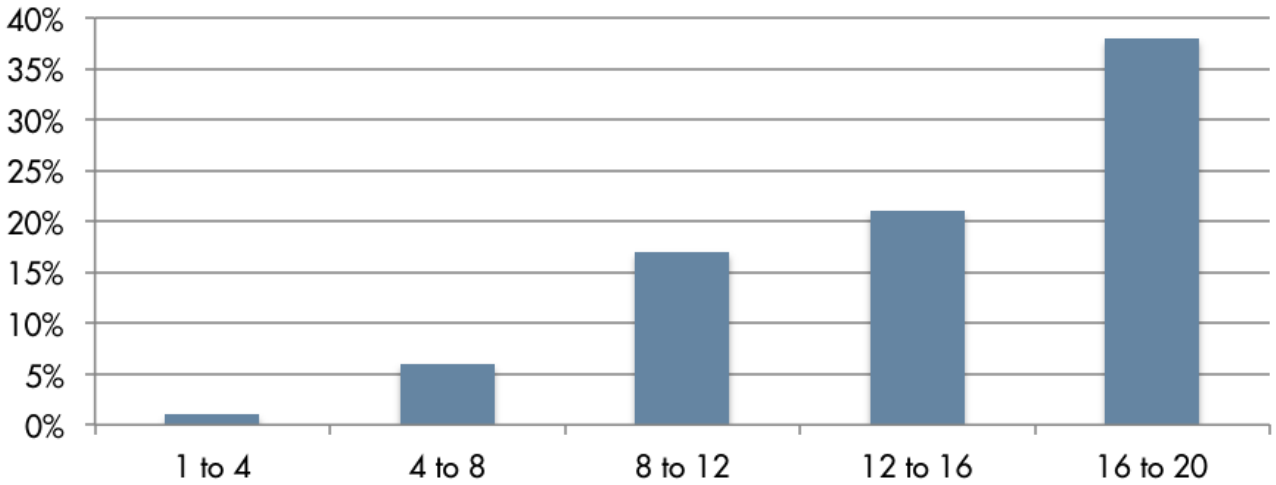
Similarly, Canadians living with disabilities also generally have lower rates of participation in the labour market, with Statistics Canada estimating the employment rate of disabled persons at roughly 35 percentage points lower than the general population.³

It is worth noting however that for Aboriginal students and students with disabilities, both groups experience higher levels of employment in-study than the general survey population: further research into the differences between summer and in-study employment opportunities for these populations may be warranted.

For the students who did participate in some form of summer employment, the length of these placements was generally substantial. As demonstrated in Figure 2, students tended to have positions that lasted upwards of 12 weeks, with the majority of these jobs being between 16 and 20 weeks, or the entirety of the summer term.

In addition, of students who worked during the summer, the majority also found positions

FIGURE 2: NUMBER OF WEEKS OF SUMMER EMPLOYMENT



that allowed them to work a number of hours approaching the average workweek. As Figure 3 illustrates, students generally followed a normal distribution of workweek hours, with most achieving between 30 and 50 hours. It is important to note however that a number of these students held more than one job simultaneously, but this distinction is not highlighted in the data. It is therefore probable that these students

worked lower hours across their various roles.

Students were also asked about the hourly wage they received during their summer employment. The breakdown for these responses can be seen in Figure 4, and the majority of students (72 per cent) actually earned a wage that exceeded Ontario's minimum wage of 10.25. The average hourly wage of students who reported working over the summer was in fact \$13.10.

FIGURE 3: NUMBER OF HOURS STUDENTS WORKED PER WEEK

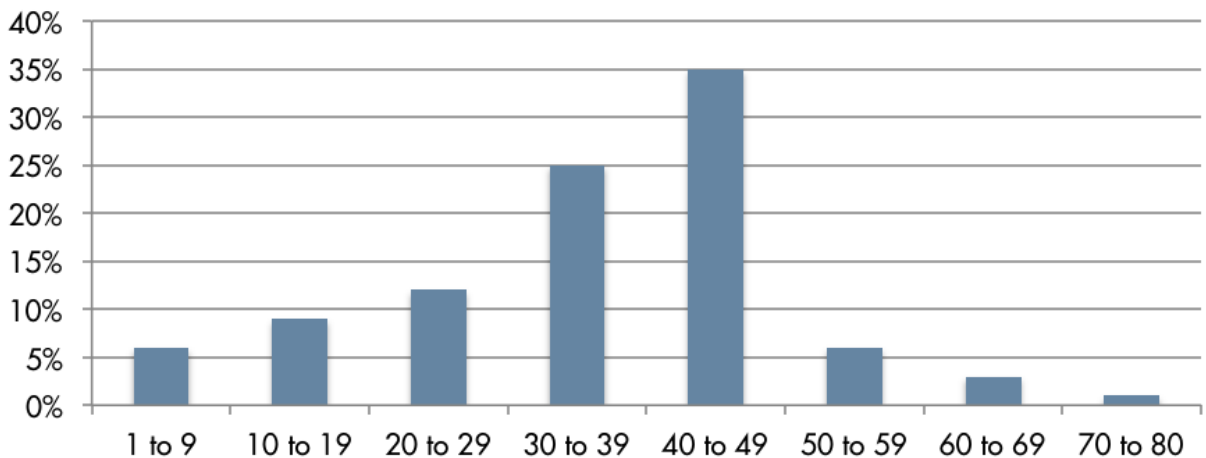
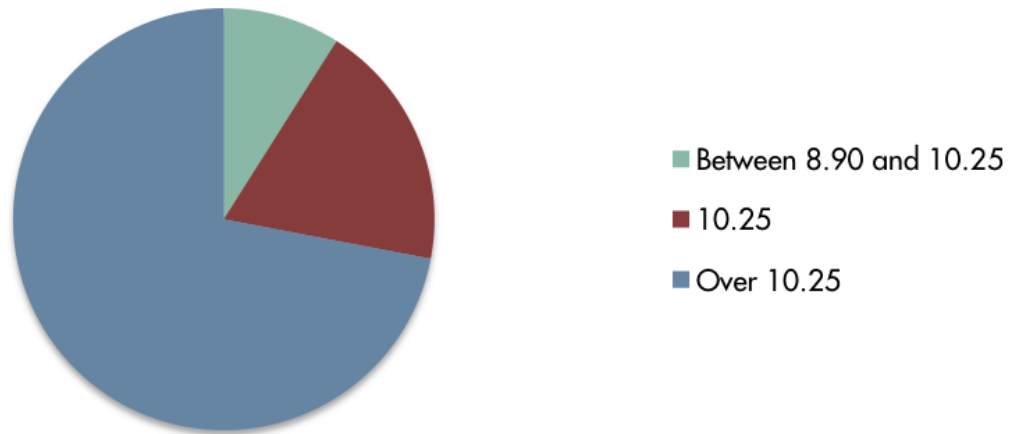


FIGURE 4: HOURLY WAGE OF STUDENTS DURING SUMMER EMPLOYMENT

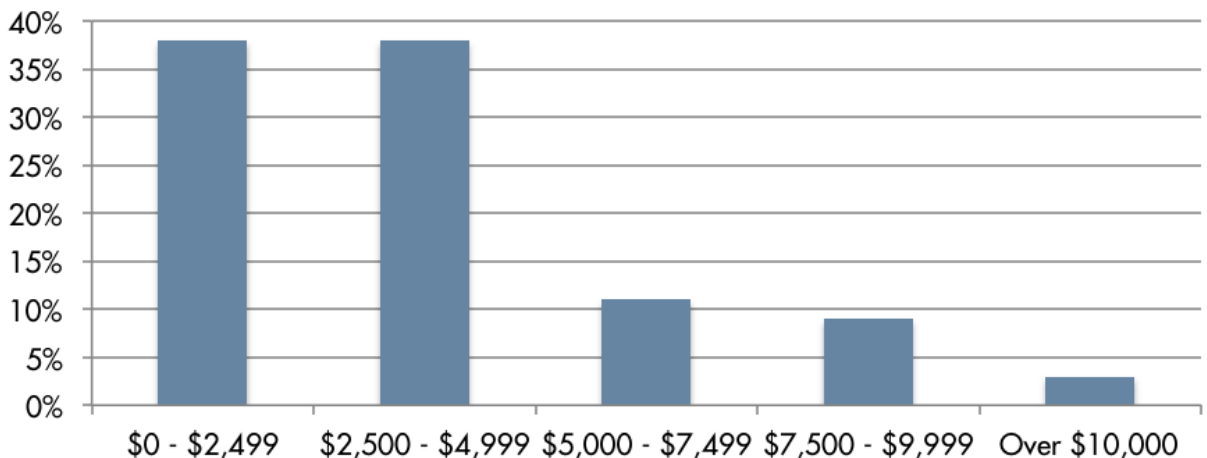


In regards to the effect of student summer jobs on financing their education, the average student respondent reported saving just over \$4,000 towards their education. In Figure 5, student responses are broken down by amount of money saved, and it is apparent that the majority of students saved under \$5,000 for their education over the summer. The average cost of undergraduate tuition in Ontario for 2012/13 was \$6,975; however additional ancillary fees, textbooks and supplies, and the substantial cost of living in Ontario can provide additional burdens to

a student's budget. By saving approximately \$4,000, those students who were able to save during their summer months were able to make an important contribution to offsetting these costs. However, it is important to remember that just over a quarter of all students surveyed did not have a job, meaning they did not have the same financial resources as their employed counterparts to fund their education.

Although students reported being able to save a sizeable portion of their summer income, many

FIGURE 5: DISTRIBUTION OF MONEY SAVED FOR SCHOOL BY STUDENTS



students admitted they would work more hours if they were available to them. Of the students who responded to having at least one summer job, 54 per cent agreed that they would work more hours if they could have, while 36 per cent disagreed and the remaining 9 per cent were unsure. Whether due to financial need, or seeking to gain work experience, it is clear that there is a high demand for increased work opportunities for post-secondary students in Ontario over the summer.

Of the students who were unemployed during the summer months, many were not planning to work in the first place. In fact, this represented a large proportion of students surveyed who did not have a summer job; roughly 48 per cent reported that they had not actively looked for summer employment. Reasons for not working varied, as demonstrated in Figure 6. It should be noted that respondents were able to select more than one applicable response.

Based on the results, it was clear that summer courses were the main reason that students refrained from working during their summer months. A smaller portion of students also listed volunteering or not

being in financial need as reasons for remaining unemployed. Interestingly, less than 3 per cent of students cited not believing they would be successful in finding work as a reason for not looking for a job.

Perhaps of most concern were students' responses to whether their summer employment was related to their field of academic study. Overwhelmingly, students answered that their job was not related to their field of study, with just under two thirds doing so.

In order to further investigate job relatedness to field of study, breakdowns were done discriminating data based on both post-secondary institution and faculty. The findings are presented in Figure 8 for institution and Figure 9 for faculty.

From Figure 8, it is apparent that the majority of OUSA member schools experienced roughly one third of their students obtaining summer jobs related to their field of study, and two thirds obtaining ones that were unrelated. The notable exception is the University of Waterloo, where students with jobs related to their field of study during the summer actually exceeded those without. Possible explanation

FIGURE 6: REASONS FOR NOT SEEKING SUMMER EMPLOYMENT

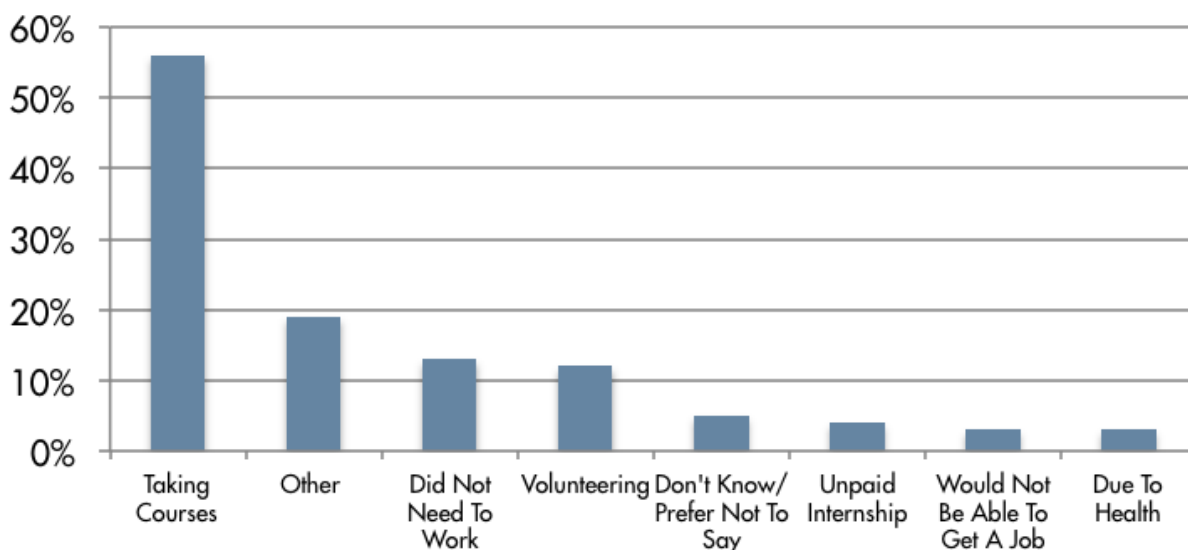
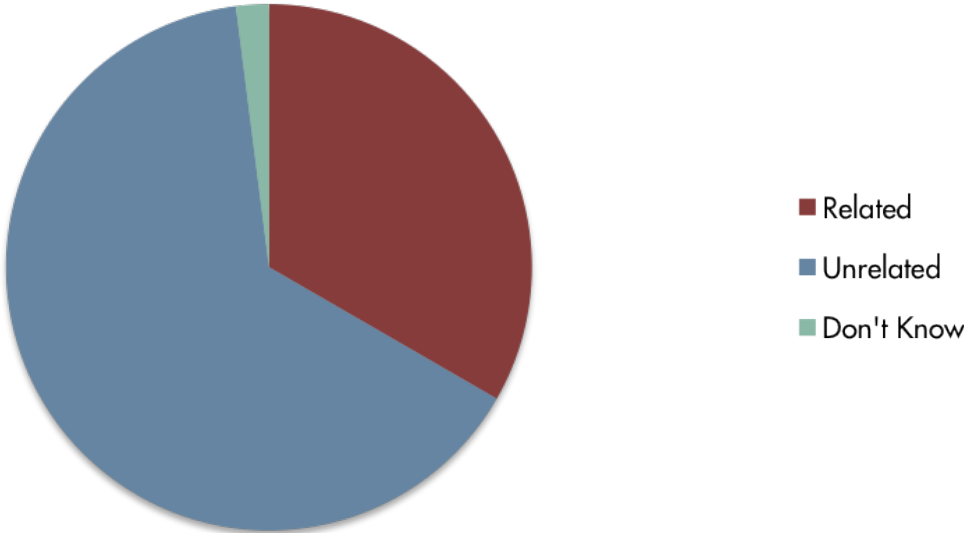


FIGURE 7: RELATION OF SUMMER EMPLOYMENT TO FIELD OF STUDY



for this difference is likely found in Waterloo’s centralized and expansive co-op program, which helps connect students with jobs related to their program during term 3, which occurs in the summer.

By field of study, there was also a noticeable difference between some disciplines in regards to the proportion of students who found summer work

related to their academic background. In business, management and public administration, approximately 42 per cent of students worked over the summer in a position related to their field of study. In engineering, architecture and related technologies this number reached 61 per cent, making it the only academic field where over half of students surveyed reported finding a job related to their academics over

FIGURE 8: RELATION OF SUMMER EMPLOYMENT TO FIELD OF STUDY, BY INSTITUTION

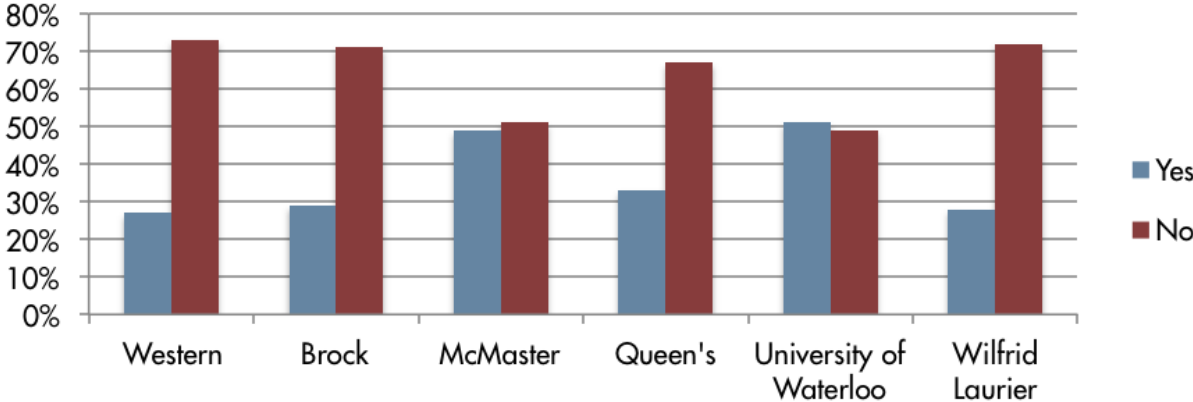
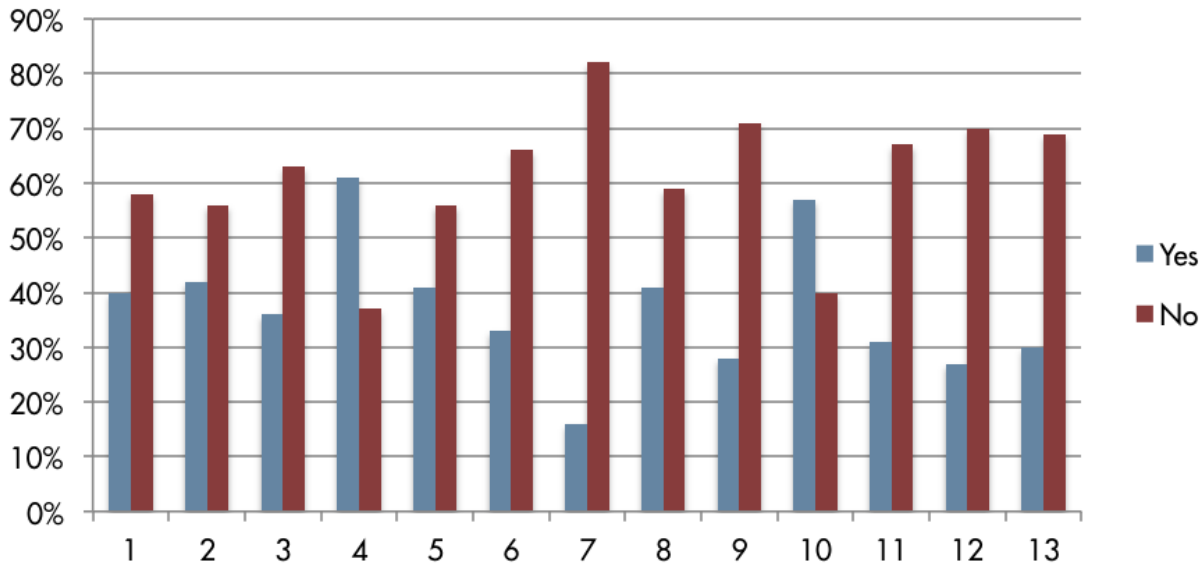


FIGURE 9: RELATION OF SUMMER EMPLOYMENT TO FIELD OF STUDY, BY FIELD OF STUDY



- 1.) Agriculture, Environmental Sciences and Conservation
- 2.) Business, Management and Public Administration
- 3.) Education
- 4.) Engineering, Architecture and Related Technologies
- 5.) Health, Parks, Recreation and Leisure
- 6.) Health Sciences and Medicine
- 7.) Humanities and Social Sciences
- 8.) Inter-Disciplinary Studies
- 9.) Law
- 10.) Mathematics, Computer and Information Sciences
- 11.) Physical and Life Sciences
- 12.) Visual and Performing Arts
- 13.) Other

job related to the humanities and social sciences. The sciences also experienced a generally lower proportion of students working jobs in their field, with just 33 per cent and 31 per cent of students in health sciences and medicine, and physical and life sciences working in a job-related field respectively.

the summer.

Students within the humanities and social sciences experienced the lowest proportion of students working jobs related to their field of study, with just 16 per cent of students stating they found a summer

IN-STUDY EMPLOYMENT

As well as seeking summer employment, many students undertake in-study employment, that is, jobs that they maintain concurrent to their academic course of study. This can provide an additional source of finance for students, and the opportunity to gain valuable work experience. Contrary to summer placements, however, students who choose to work while studying must balance their job with their academic responsibilities, and this creates situational challenges that are very different from those present during summer employment.

Of students surveyed, 37 per cent stated they were currently working while taking courses. Certain populations of students were more likely to be working during the course of the academic year, as illustrated in the table below:

FIGURE 10: PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WORKING IN-STUDY, BY POPULATION TYPE

First Generation Students	45%
Students with Disabilities	43%
Aboriginal Students	42%
Students with Dependents	42%
Low-Income Students	39%
Rural Students	39%

Each of these populations is generally recognized as being more likely to experience financial barriers to attending university; it perhaps unsurprising then that these underrepresented groups are more likely to seek employment to help offset the costs of pursuing a post-secondary education.

Further analysis demonstrated that there were significant differences between the various areas of study, as illustrated in Figure 11. The highest rate of in-study employment was reported within the humanities and social sciences, with 52 per cent of these respondents reporting doing so. Students within health, parks, recreation and leisure, visual

and performing arts, and agriculture, environmental and conservation also experienced relatively high numbers of students working while studying, with 47 per cent, 46 per cent and 45 per cent respectively.

By a wide margin, programs related to mathematics, computer and information as well as engineering, architecture and related technologies experienced the lowest level of students doing in-study work, with 23 per cent and 21 per cent respectively.

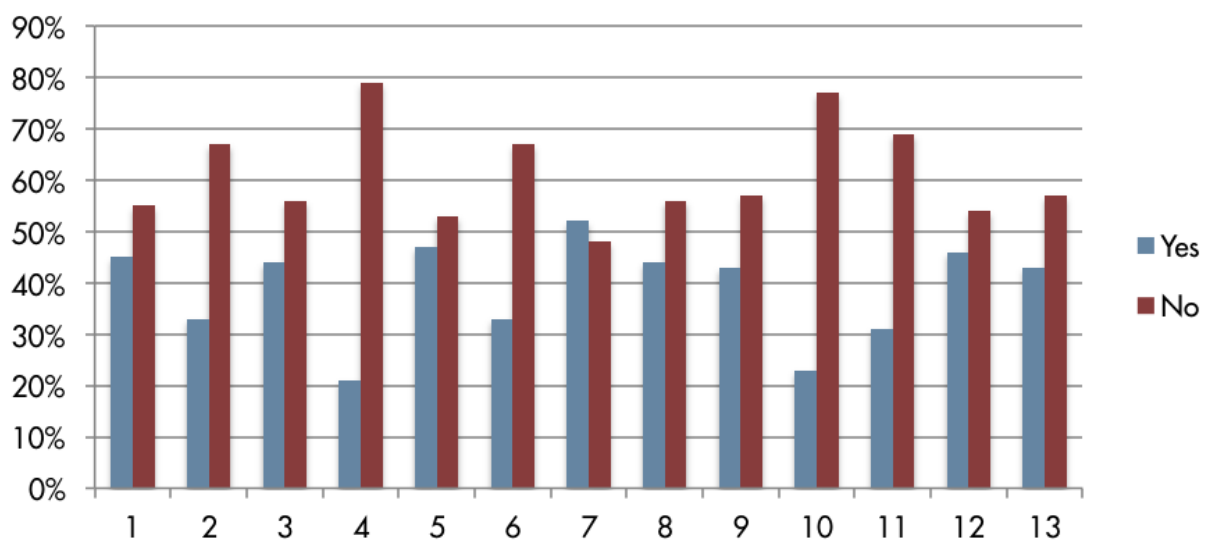
There were also differing proportions of students working in-study across OUSA member institutions. These responses are illustrated in Figure 12 on the following page. The school with the highest reported number of students working in-study was Brock University, where 50 per cent of students reported doing so. Students from the University of Waterloo reported the lowest rate of in-study employment, with just 30 per cent of respondents doing so. This difference is likely explained by Waterloo's co-op system, where students often alternate work and study terms so that students are less likely to need to work while in-study to finance their education or gain work experience during their degree.

Of students who did report working while studying, survey questions were also asked to further elaborate about their in-study employment experiences.

Hours of work during in-study employment:

With regards to working hours, nearly half reported working less than 10 hours, while average hours were slightly higher, at 14.5 per week. Far fewer students stated they worked over 20 hours, but these numbers were still significant, with 8 per cent working between 20 and 30 hours and 8 per cent working between 30 and 40 hours. Even fewer students worked over 40 hours a week, with 1 per cent working between 40 to 50 hours and less than 1 per cent working over 50. These findings are summarized in Figure 13.

FIGURE 11: STUDENTS WORKING DURING ACADEMIC TERM, BY FIELD OF STUDY



- 1.) Agriculture, Environmental Sciences and Conservation
- 2.) Business, Management and Public Administration
- 3.) Education
- 4.) Engineering, Architecture and Related Technologies
- 5.) Health, Parks, Recreation and Leisure
- 6.) Health Sciences and Medicine
- 7.) Humanities and Social Sciences
- 8.) Inter-Disciplinary Studies
- 9.) Law
- 10.) Mathematics, Computer and Information Sciences
- 11.) Physical and Life Sciences
- 12.) Visual and Performing Arts
- 13.) Other

FIGURE 12: STUDENTS WORKING DURING ACADEMIC TERM, BY INSTITUTION

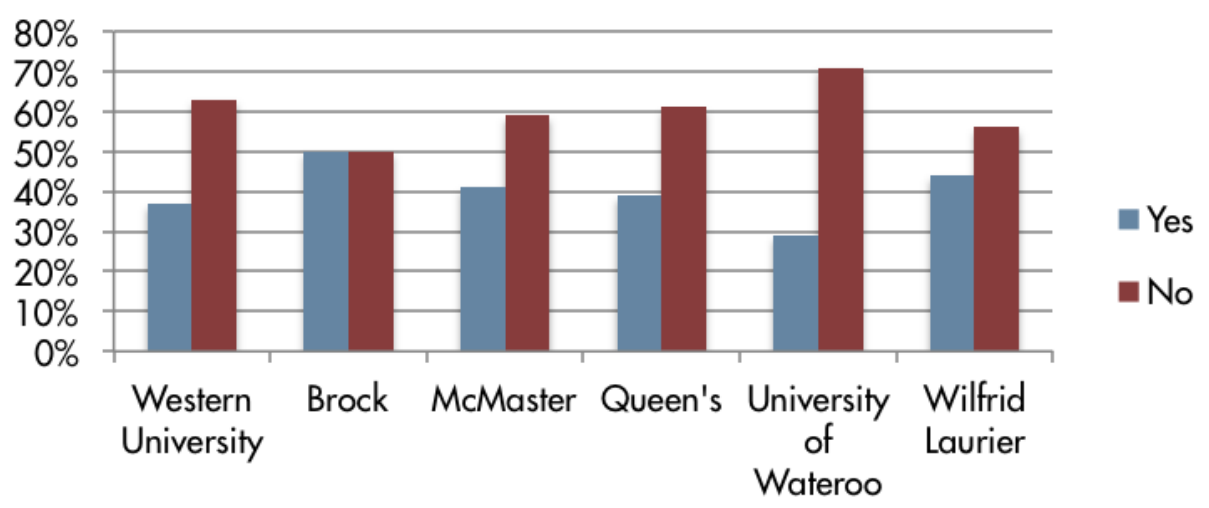
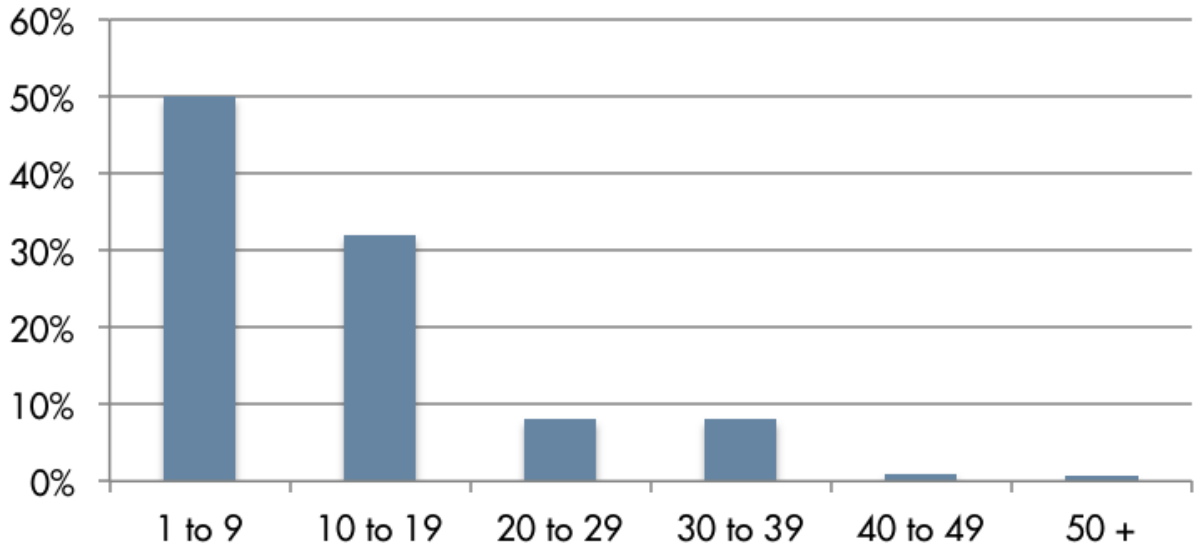


FIGURE 13: NUMBER OF HOURS WORKED PER WEEK, IN-STUDY

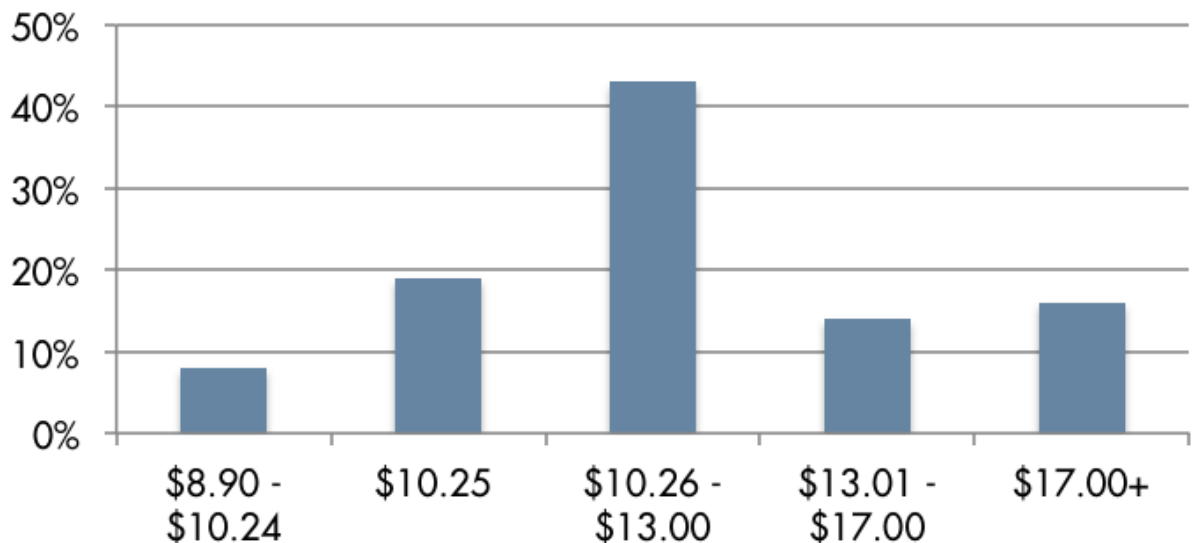


Hourly wages for in-study employment

On average, students earned \$13.25 for their in-study employment. The majority of these students - 43 per cent of respondents - reported earning

between \$10.25 and \$13.00, while just under one fifth earned \$10.25. These results are also summarized in the graph below, Figure 14.

FIGURE 14: HOURLY WAGE OF STUDENTS WORKING IN-STUDY



Impact of employment on academic performance:

Students were also asked to assess the perceived impact of in-study employment on their academic performance. The vast majority of students

responded that they felt in-study employment had negatively impacted their academic performance, with just under 60 per cent of all respondents saying in-study employment had either somewhat or significantly impacted their performance. In contrast, just 9 per cent of students felt their in-

FIGURE 15: IMPACT OF IN-STUDY EMPLOYMENT ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

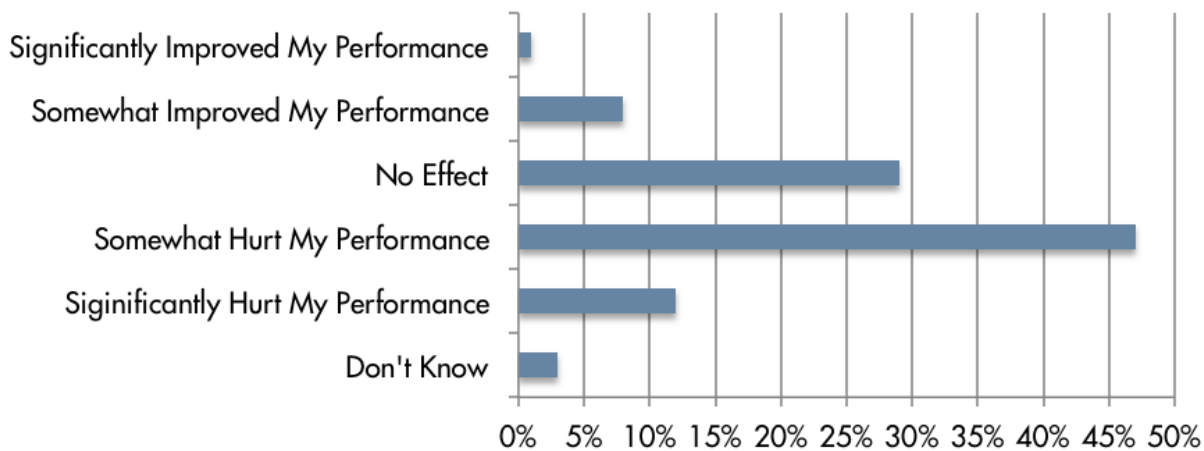
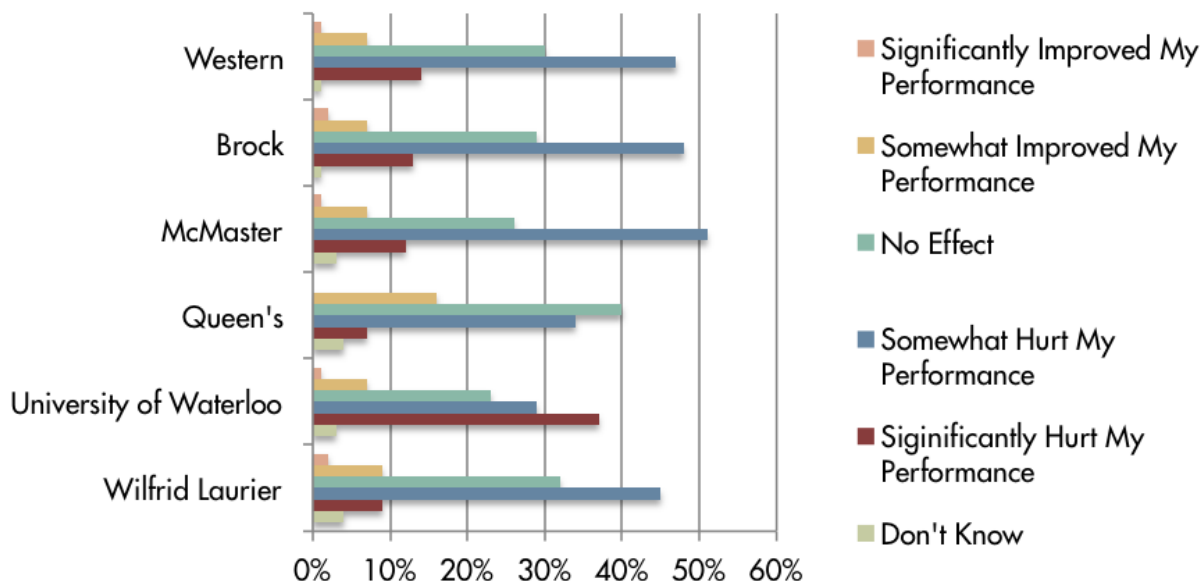


FIGURE 16: IMPACT OF IN-STUDY EMPLOYMENT ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE, BY INSTITUTION



-study employment had improved their academic performance, with just 1 per cent of students feeling that this improvement had been significant. A significant portion of students also believed their job had no effect on their academics, with 29 per cent reporting so. Nevertheless, it is evident that many students felt concerned about the impact in-study employment was having on their academics.

This pattern remained broadly consistent when compared across OUSA member schools, as demonstrated in Figure 16 on the previous page. Students from Queen's University were most positive about their in-study employment experience; with 16 per cent reporting that their employment had somewhat improved their academic performance, and 40 per cent felt there had been no impact either way. This may be attributable to the high number of student employment opportunities that are available through the Queen's Alma Mater Society (AMS): approximately 60 full-time and 500 part-time student staff work in on-campus, student roles. Students from Waterloo felt the most negatively about their in-study employment, with 66 per cent of Waterloo respondents stating their academic performance had been either somewhat or significantly harmed.

When asked whether their in-study employment

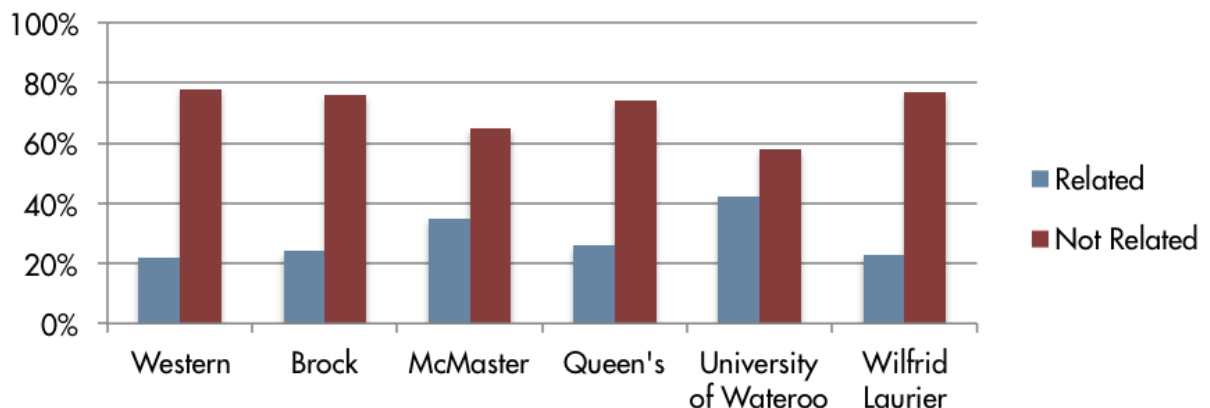
was related to their field of study, just 31 per cent of students responded positively. Over two-thirds of students stated that their current employment was not related to their field of study.

These numbers were also further broken down by faculty and institution to see whether they were different depending on where and what students were studying for in their post-secondary education.

As Figure 17 shows, for all institutions the number of students who worked jobs unrelated to their program was higher than the number of students whose jobs were related. The University of Waterloo boasted the highest percentage of students with program-related jobs, with 42 per cent of students responding with this option. Students from Western University were least likely to have employment that related to their field of study.

Whether in-study employment was related to field of study differed also differed across academic disciplines. Just 3 of the 13 areas demonstrated that a majority of students had been able to find in-study jobs that were related to their program. These were visual and performing arts with 62 per cent of students reporting relatedness, followed by engineering, architecture and related technologies with 59 per cent

FIGURE 17: RELATION OF IN-STUDY EMPLOYMENT TO FIELD OF STUDY, BY INSTITUTION



and then mathematics, computer and information sciences with 53 per cent. As is demonstrated in Figure 18, students in health, parks, recreation and leisure, as well as health sciences and medicine and inter-disciplinary studies also experienced relatively high rates of job-program relatedness.

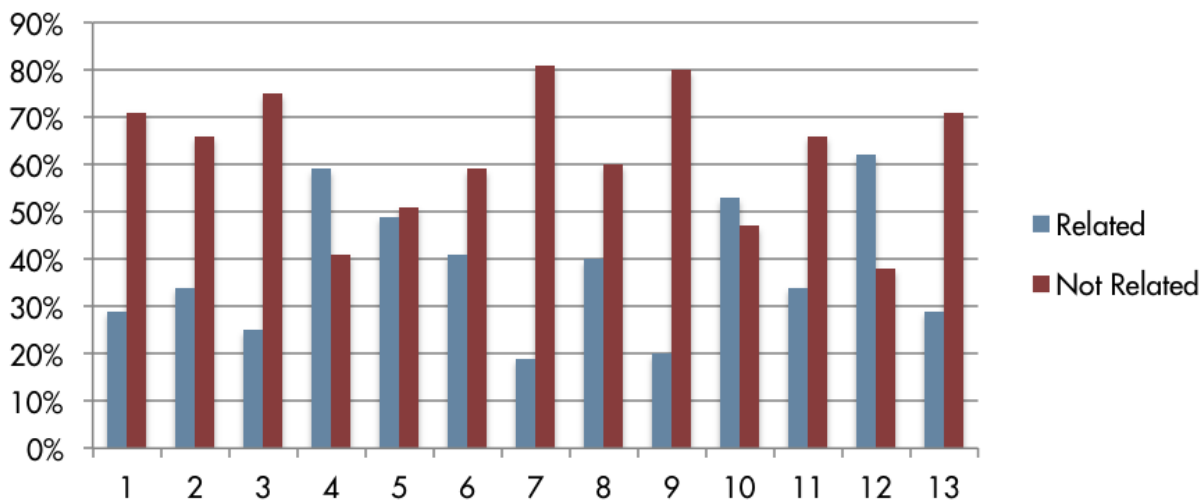
There were also areas of study that showed quite low job-relatedness for students, with under a quarter of students working in-study jobs that were in the area of their study. These subjects were education, law and humanities and social sciences, which experienced 25 per cent, 20 per cent and 19 per cent of students responding with working a job that was within their area of study. This finding is particularly concerning for students in the humanities and social sciences, as

their summer employment also showed the lowest relation of employment to academic study, indicating that these students may struggle to find employment opportunities that directly connect to their field.

Impact of financial stability on decisions to work:

Lastly, students were also surveyed on whether their finances were a factor in their decision to work during the academic term. Figure 19 contains the responses for the question, and it is clear that the majority of students (59 per cent), would have chosen not to work in-study if they had enough money to pay for their tuition and living expenses. This is compared to 31 per cent who believed they

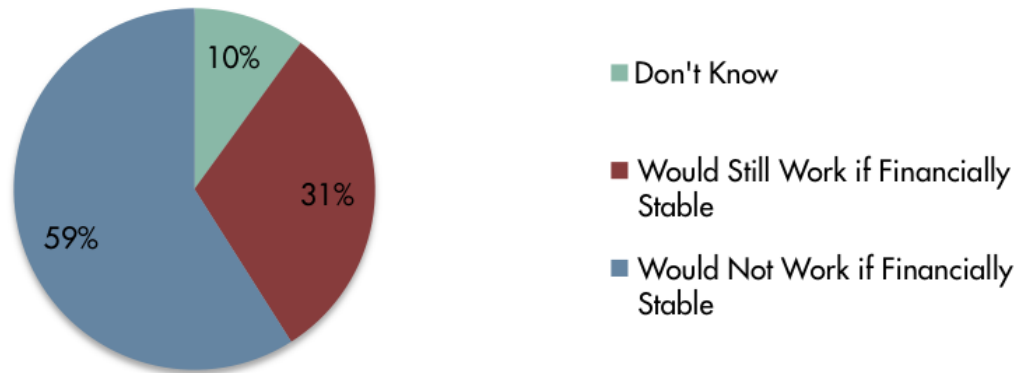
FIGURE 18: RELATION OF IN-STUDY EMPLOYMENT TO FIELD OF STUDY, BY FIELD OF STUDY



- 1.) Agriculture, Environmental Sciences and Conservation
- 2.) Business, Management and Public Administration
- 3.) Education
- 4.) Engineering, Architecture and Related Technologies
- 5.) Health, Parks, Recreation and Leisure
- 6.) Health Sciences and Medicine

- 7.) Humanities and Social Sciences
- 8.) Inter-Disciplinary Studies
- 9.) Law
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- 12.) Visual and Performing Arts
- 13.) Other

FIGURE 19: EFFECT OF FINANCIAL STABILITY ON STUDENT DECISIONS TO WORK



would still have chosen to work, while 10 per cent were unsure. These findings demonstrate that financial need is a major factor for students who are choosing to work during their academic term.

These responses remained largely consistent when compared across various populations, as summarized in the table below: students from

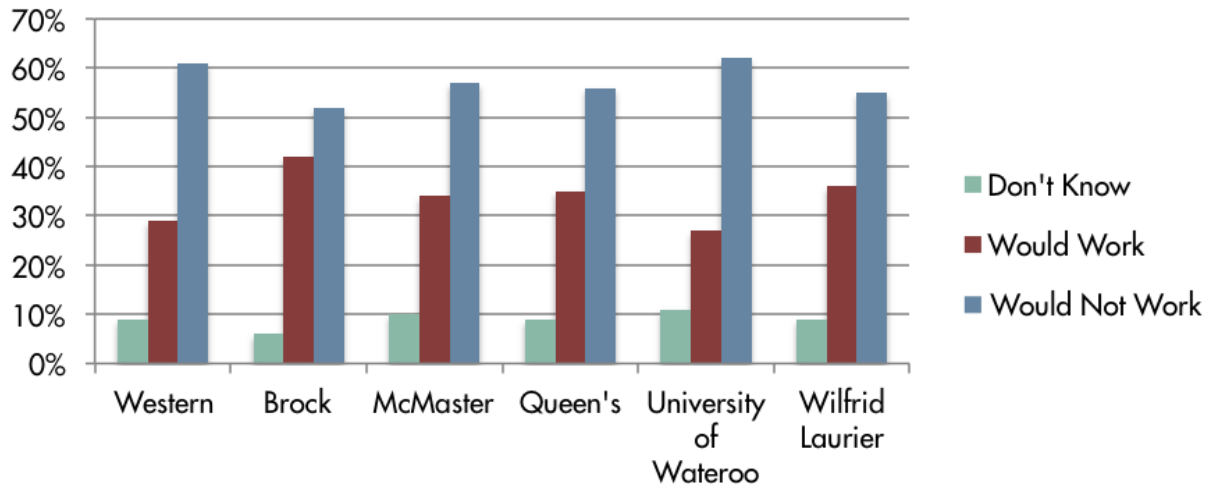
rural communities and low-income students were slightly more likely to report they would not work if they had sufficient financial resources.

These responses were also fairly consistent across institutions. Students from the University of Waterloo were the least likely to say that would work if financially stable, with 62 per cent of

FIGURE 20: PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHO WOULD NOT WORK IN-STUDY IF IT WERE NOT FINANCIALLY NECESSARY, BY POPULATION TYPE

Rural Students	63%
Low-Income Students	62%
Students with Dependents	60%
Students with Disabilities	59%
Aboriginal Students	58%
First Generation Students	57%

FIGURE 21: EFFECT OF FINANCIAL STABILITY ON STUDENT DECISIONS TO WORK, BY INSTITUTION



students responding negatively, while students from Brock were most likely to respond positively to this question, with 42 per cent responding that they would continue to work. However, as Figure 21 illustrates, across all institutions, the majority of students indicate that they would prefer not to work in-study, and only do so out of financial necessity.

HELPFUL TANGENT: WORK-STUDY

It is evident from analysis of the Ontario Post-Secondary Student Survey that many students are working in-study due to financial need, but that they have significant concerns that this work may be impacting the academic performance.

Particularly for students from high-need populations, the expansion of work-study opportunities could offer substantial relief of financial burdens, without having to sacrifice academic success.

In 2012, the Government of Ontario cut funding from a grant that helped post-secondary institutions fund work-study programs. This funding was discontinued in order to help fund the 30-Off Ontario Tuition Grant (OTG). OUSA is strongly supportive of the OTG, but nevertheless remains concerned about what the impact of reduced funding for work-study programs has had on employment opportunities for students.

Work-study employment often offers an attractive opportunity to students, as these positions are generally flexible, and help students to tailor their hours around their academic obligations.

The impact of the Province's decision has varied across institutions: for example, Western University has committed to continuing its work-study program with no changes in number of available positions or administration, while the University of Ontario Institute of Technology (UOIT) has had to make reductions in the number of maximum hours students are eligible to work due to the loss of program funding. OUSA is encouraged that, as of summer 2013, no university had completely ceased work-study offerings, but it is nevertheless undeniable that in order to maintain these programs increasingly strained institutional resources have had to be diverted.

As is demonstrated by the findings of this survey, there is a clear need for in-study employment amongst students that is both educationally effective and responsive to students' academic needs. Re-instating investments in work-study programs should be seen as part of a wider youth employment strategy, and an important investment in preparing students for their transition to the workplace through high-quality paid opportunities that do not impede their studies.

CONCLUSION

OUSA's biennial survey is an important avenue through which students can share their university experiences in order to inspire positive change within the post-secondary sector. From the survey's results, OUSA understands that student jobs are an important and challenging aspect of one's university career, and these opportunities can vary across Ontario institutions and areas of study.

OUSA is encouraged that our survey showed that the majority of students were able to find employment during the summer months, including many well-paying positions that lasted the duration of the summer. The ability of students to save significant amounts of money through undertaking summer employment allows these students to significantly offset the high cost of tuition and living expenses associated with attending post-secondary in Ontario.

It is worth reiterating that not all students were employed during the summer period, with most unemployed students indicating that they were unable to work due to taking courses in the summer term.

Consistently high levels of students also undertook in-study employment. However, for both summer and in-study employment, it was rare for students to report their employment being related to their field of study, indicating that students are likely pursuing these positions more for the financial assistance they provide, than the value of the work experience. Given the increased expectation that university will prepare students to transition to the workplace, it is of clear concern that students are failing to find paid work that complements their studies.

It is further worrying that high proportions of students actually report that their need to work during the school year negatively impacts their academic performance. This finding is compounded by the fact that many students would choose not to work in-study, if the financial necessity to do so was removed. It is evident that there is interplay between unmet financial need, high tuition and living costs,

and the need to seek employment: even at the expense of academics.

OUSA hopes this report can begin a conversation between students, institutions, and stakeholders on how to improve student employment experiences. In particular, we look forward to fruitful discussions on how the connections between a student's study and their employment can be better strengthened, and how the negative impacts of in-study employment can be mitigated.

ENDNOTES

1.) McCloy, U., & Sattler, P. (2010). *From Postsecondary Application to the Labour Market: The Pathways of Under-represented Groups*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

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3.) Statistics Canada (2006). *Disability in the Workplace*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

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