



**Job Perceptions of Generation Y in the Transition  
from School to Work**

**Colleen Dunnigan, James Frankum, Taylor Ison, Paul Matthews, Patrycja Smiech, Li  
Zhou**

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**Primary Instructor: Dr. Sean Lyons**

## **Abstract**

The business/commerce sector of today's workforce is becoming more and more dynamic and Generation Y workers are. It is considered prudent for personnel managers to be familiar with different generation types so as to initiate proper mechanisms to mitigate organizational change resistance and employee turnover, increase job satisfaction and motivation and lastly to foster proper employee relationship within the organization. Currently statistics exhibit that generation Y are legal professionals and currently entering the workforce (Sheahan, 2005, pp. 22-58). This project however, seeks to find out the perception of students (who are considered to be in generation Y) in obtaining a job in their field of interest.

The research question of this study is; how are undergraduate students' perceptions of job prospects affected by their program and co-operative placement. Different groups of students were compared. The study considers independent variables such as work placement and career services, the cause and effect results these two attributes may have on dependent variable of students' perceptions of finding employment in their field of study. Some of the variables used in this study to find out the perception of students in obtaining a job in the designated degree field include: Years of study completed by the student, co-op students, satisfaction with degree programs and satisfaction with the University career services. The control variables will include, gender, age, program/major and the university.

The main hypothesis for the study is to: investigate if cooperative work placements in business/commerce degree programs are likely to lead to more positive student perception of career path expectations that align with their undergraduate degree. The study method included online administration of surveys to undergraduate business students in Canada. In order to obtain a clearer view of the obtained results, the results were compared to the existing literature related to the research topic.

## **Introduction**

University enrolment in Canada has been higher than ever before and has increased much over the past two decades. Obtaining some form of post-secondary education is becoming the norm for most Canadians (Knighton, Hujaleh, Iacampo & Werkneh, 2009). Unfortunately with the high number of Canadians enrolling in post secondary education, jobs after students graduate are more competitive than ever before. The transition from the resource-based to a knowledge-based economy in which Canada is experiencing will require most people seeking employment to have a post-secondary level education. It is that critical point during a student's undergraduate study where their perceptions will guide them through the school to work transition. Those perceptions of students vary greatly based on many variables, which we explored during our research. We decided upon five separate variables that would help us determine what drives students perceptions concerning a career path once they have graduated. They are: The years completed by the student, co-op placement, students who have switched majors, the student's satisfaction with their degree program, and the satisfaction with university career services. By reviewing and examining these five variables, a model can be drawn into what effects student's perception of

obtaining a job in their field once they graduate. Our first hypothesis is that students enrolled in a co-op work placement in business/commerce degree programs will lead to more positive student perceptions of career path expectation that align with their undergraduate degree. Our second hypothesis is that the current year of study which participants are in will contribute to students' perceptions of finding a job in their major/field. Our third and final hypothesis is that participants who enjoy their institution's environment and perceive their institution's career services to be helpful will have a higher perception of obtaining a job within their field of study. The importance of this study has many potential useful benefits. For example, schools can use the information we gather to help align students' perceptions with the reality of the job market, and better understand their students' perceptions of how prepared the school makes them for their transition into the workforce. By identifying what effects students' perceptions, improvements can be made to those variables if needed. The items that effect students' perceptions can then be controlled in order to increase or change student perceptions regarding employment. For example, if it is known that student satisfaction with university career services is low and that is positively correlated with poor perception of obtaining a job in your degree field, then changes can be made to universities' career services program to increase their perceptions.

## **Materials and Methods**

### Sample

The participants that we targeted to complete our survey consisted of university undergraduate business commerce students from Ontario universities varying in levels of study, from 1<sup>st</sup> year students to 4<sup>th</sup> + year students. Our recruitment strategy heavily relied on forms of

social media. Survey links posted on facebook, class emails, and word-of-mouth advertising were the main channels of distributing our survey. The target participants in our study were composed of students aged 17-23 years old, but an option for other ages was provided. All participants were university students. Women had a higher response rate than men, 85 women completed our survey or 54% of the completed responses, compared to 41 men or 26 %. This leaves 31 respondents who choose not to answer the question related to gender. This however did not effect the results as we did not hypothesize that gender would have an effect on a student's perceptions of choosing a career path. Overall we distributed approximately 500 surveys through our channels of distribution. Our total number of responses was 177, which results in a response rate of 35% (177/500). Most of our responses occurred the first few days of launching our survey and we came to the conclusion that we had enough responses and did not need to hand out paper questionnaires to possible participants. The rate of incomplete surveys was 11% of our total responses, which accounts for 20 incomplete surveys. This could be due to the respondent not wishing to confirm consent and therefore not being able to start the survey, or another reason could be that potential respondents were not aware that they needed to be a business student before they started.

### Measures

The dependent variable in our study was the student's perception of obtaining a job in a designated field that reflects their current program major. This variable is dependent on all of our independent variables, which include; years completed by the student, co-op work placements, students who have switched majors, and satisfaction with degree program and university career services. The control variables used in our study are age, gender, program/degree, and

University. The independent and dependent variables were measured on 5 point Likert scales that measured the importance of each variable to the student. For example,

“What do you perceive to be the likelihood of getting a job in your designated major after you graduate” (perception of career path).

Not likely at all      Unlikely      Somewhat Likely      Likely      Very Likely

“How satisfied are you with your current degree program” (satisfaction)

Not at all Satisfied    Not very Satisfied    Somewhat Satisfied    Satisfied    Very Satisfied

### Analysis Procedures

In our study we gathered data solely from the administration of a survey questionnaire. All of the measures we used were pre tested before administration of the survey to ensure adequacy. The data collected from the survey contained mainly quantitative responses and were analyzed for correlations between our dependent and independent variables. The Pearson Correlation ( $r$ ) is the strength of the relationship between two variables. It ranges from -1 (perfect negative correlation), through 0 (no correlation), through 1 (perfect positive correlation). A correlation of less than .40 (positive or negative) is considered to be weak. If the correlation is between .40 and .60, then the correlation is moderate. A correlation is considered to be strong when the  $r$  value is greater than .60. The significance level ( $p$ ) represents the probability that a correlation coefficient from our sample could actually be 0 in the population given our sample size.  $P < 0.05$  is considered acceptable, as it indicates that the correlation will be accurate in 95% of random sample sizes of relative size. A  $p < 0.01$  means a 99% confidence level in the coefficient. To analyze this data we looked at significant correlations between our variables and

determined whether they showed weak, moderate, and strong relationships to determine their significance to our research question.

## **Results**

As mentioned before the total amount of respondents to the survey were 177. Of that 20 were incomplete, leaving us with a 157 full responses and a full response rate of 89% in relation to total responses and 31% of the total number of surveys distributed. From the data collected we were able to determine various correlations that helped to support our hypotheses, however many of our hypotheses could not be proven due to a high p-value in a significant number of correlations. The high p-value can be attributed to a low number of responses to a particular item in the survey. When analyzing the data against our first hypothesis we did indeed find evidence that we were on the right track with our initial thoughts; however we cannot prove this hypothesis due to the many high p-values that were found with the correlations. With a higher sample size and response rate specifically to the co-op questions we may be able to reduce some of the p-values and maintain a similar correlation on many of the items. For example, there is a positive correlation of 0.55 between students believing that their co-op placement will helpful in the future, and how adamant they are at following a career in that field. This would support our hypothesis if the p-value was not so high at 0.16. There was a positive correlation of 0.43 between the perceived future value of co-op placement and perceptions of obtaining a job in that field, but again there was a high p-value of 0.28. A piece of data that is statistically significant, and somewhat supports our hypothesis is a strong negative correlation between students plans to stay in current major for the whole duration of their undergraduate degree, and perceived future

value of co-op placement (Yes was given a 1 value and No was given a 2 value, hence the reason the correlation was negative).

Our second Hypothesis that the amount of years completed will positively correlate with perceptions of obtaining a job in their degree field was not supported by any of our data collected. There was no statistical significance in any of the items we believed would show some correlation, such as how adamant students were to follow a career in their major, their perceptions of obtaining a career in their major, and whether or not they would accept a job in another field if jobs were scarce or hold out for a job that aligned with their major. The only statistically significant finding in this hypothesis was a weak negative correlation of -0.18 between higher years completed and perceptions that the first job would be in the degree field (again the negative correlation is due to Yes being ranked as 1 and No as 2; therefore higher year students were more optimistic about first jobs being in their degree field). This was contrary to what we initially believed as we hypothesized that it would be lower year students with more optimistic attitudes towards obtaining jobs, due to their possible lesser understanding of the job market than higher year students. It should be noted that age also did not show statistical significance in any when measured for correlations against the same items, suggesting that our beliefs on this hypothesis were false.

Our third hypothesis was more successful and some statistically significant data that gives support to our initial beliefs was found. The hypothesis was that students' satisfaction with their institutions environment and career assistance programs would be positively correlated to perceptions of obtaining a job in their major. We found a positive correlation between



satisfaction with the degree program and satisfaction with both institution career services (0.38) and institution environment (0.65). Both of these correlations had a p-value of 0.00 suggesting an extremely low to no chance of false positives. Students perceptions of getting a job in their major were also positively correlated with both institution satisfaction items at 0.3 for both and a 0.00 p-value for both items. Students perceptions of their first job being in their major field had a positive correlation of 0.25 with satisfaction of institution career assistance, with a p-value of 0.005. There was not a statistically significant correlation between first jobs being in the major and satisfaction with institution environment. Not surprisingly there was a positive correlation of 0.42 between satisfaction with institution career services and satisfaction with institution environment with a p-value of 0.00. These findings provide support for our third hypothesis and can be valuable for future research. It shows that the school or institution a student is enrolled in does in fact play a large role in students' perceptions of their ability to apply the competencies they acquire through their undergraduate degree program to a transition into the workforce that aligns with their undergraduate major.

In our data collection we came across some findings that were rather interesting and lead us to believe we should have included a fourth hypothesis. Students who are adamant about pursuing a career in their degree field will have more positive perceptions on their abilities to obtain jobs in that career field. Across all items that were related to perceptions of obtaining a job in the degree field statistically significant positive correlations were present as well as positive correlations to many other items, suggesting an overall positive correlation between adamant attitudes and positive overall attitudes. The students who were very adamant had higher perceptions of obtaining jobs in their degree field and were very satisfied with their institutions and degree

programs. This suggests something that we overlooked from the start; that personality could play a large role as a moderating variable in a student's perception of obtaining a job in their degree field. We believe that a student who ranked high on adamant attitude toward obtaining a job in their degree field suggests higher levels of conscientiousness which is often referred to as a strong indicator of job performance. With further investigation of personality traits applied to the same research question we believe we could enrich the findings we have already collected.

## **Discussion**

This study has investigated the perceptions and confidence that undergraduate students have retained in rendering a future job within their field of study on the foundation of knowledge and experience acquired within their program and co-op placement. In general, the perceptions of both academic and placement work resulted in a positive correlation but could not be confirmed due to a high likelihood of error. We maintain our original hypothesis and believe with more resources we could prove our initial beliefs.

University students' perceptions of job/career options may vary between individuals due to the fact of many variables: job market availability of jobs in their program of study, assistance from academic services and counseling, experience through co-op, knowledge and opportunities attained at a certain GPA level, and many other variables. This study examined students' expectations considering the impact of these variables. By concentrating on students' perceptions

of their job/career expectations as they come close to graduating, we were able to assess what primary variables affected this perception through means and how variable it could be through standard deviations. We considered existing literature discussing the trends of school to work transition, compared to students' area of study during university. From this, we also determined if student perceptions align with reality or if students' perceptions are misguided or unrealistic and if their post secondary employment goals will likely be met or not. Further consideration can also be given to changing student perceptions in relation to obtaining a job/career in their field while still in university in order for students to be more prepared once they enter the workforce.

The main objective of our study was to determine the likelihood of business undergraduate students pursuing a career in their designated field of study. We wanted to assess the impact of certain independent variables on an undergraduate's path to pursuing a career choice. We also sought to determine students' perceptions of their designated career field and the correlation between their perceptions and future career paths. This was then used to understand the current school-to-work transition for undergraduate students who are looking to either enter the workplace or pursue further education, and the factors that affect their decisions.

Some other interesting findings were that over 90 percent of participants whom had changed their major throughout their University education were very satisfied with their current career and had a .450 correlation that they would get a job in their field. Subsequently, those who had not changed their major had a .234 correlation that they believed they would obtain a career in their chosen field.

One of the strongest correlations of .643 came from how adamant students were to obtain a job in their career if they already have a potential job lined up in their career. This shows that a large number of students have already made connections for future employment and that many, although have potential careers, will still look for other options.

What was intriguing was that a correlation coefficient of .555 was found for students who will accept the first job that comes to them even if it is not in their designated field. This means that many students are studying branches of B.Comm will not necessarily wait for a job in their major if another opportunity arises. Overall this moderate relationship helped answer our research question in what students perceptions are of obtaining a career in their designated field. However, for future research things such as compensation and benefits must be weighted accordingly.

The results of our study will help companies who are looking at recruiting business students and see their perceptions and drive towards careers. It will give them insight on the perceptions held by undergraduates about their degree program and determine factors that prevent students from pursuing business careers. Instructors of these degree programs could also use the information provided from this study. If a certain degree field has a lower completion rate than others, this study will be able to contribute factors to why students do not complete their degrees and or why they do or do not pursue a career in this field. "By understanding the students' priorities, corporate recruiters can effectively assess whether there is a good fit between their organizations and specific candidates, and can better tailor their offers to increase their attractiveness to them. (Iacocou, C L, Shirland, L, Thompson, R L 2004)ö.

## **Literature Contributions**

The data collected from our research study and inferences we have made through analyses of the data can be strengthened by comparing them to existing literature. Firstly, although we did not prove our first hypothesis due to the high p-values, our continued belief of this hypothesis can be supported by current literature. "A learning environment increases the motivation of students, which, in turn, increases their learning outcomes. Learning outcomes show a significant relationship with success in the initial phase of graduates' careers (Vermeulen, Lyanda; Schmidt, Henk, 2008)."

Our second hypothesis that we were unsuccessful in supporting whatsoever was that the year of study would have an effect on the perceptions of students. We came to this hypothesis due to our own reasoning but were further convinced due to published journal articles. "It is suggested that current teaching methods and goals offer much scope for the development of a range of competences, but that attention could usefully focus on the further development of students' team-working skills and on clearer distinctions between second and final year academic work in terms of competence development (Arnold, J., J. Loan-Clarke, A. Harrington, and C. Hart. 1999)." We believed, along with the authors, that different teaching techniques used on different years of students would affect the perceptions the students have of the job market and therefore their perceptions of getting a job in their field of study.

Our final hypothesis that was supported through the data analyses was that students who were satisfied with their institution's career assistance programs and environment would have higher perceptions of obtaining a job in their degree field. "Students with higher GPAs, coop students,

and men also indicated more confidence in their job search following use of their university career services (Eddy S.W. Ng, Ronald J. Burke, 2006). Although we were not measuring gender to correlate with our data this still supports the idea that career services do in fact increase perceptions of job attainment.

The hypothesis that we developed after our data was collected, that suggested students with adamant attitudes toward their field of study would have high perceptions of obtaining a job in that field of study, was also supported with literature. "Students reporting job-related goals are more likely to make positive persistence decisions than students reporting unknown goals. (Hull-Blanks, Elva; Robinson Kurpius, Sharon E. B.C. 2005)" As mentioned earlier we believe that goal setting is related to high levels of conscientiousness which is a positive indicator of job performance. So not only does adamant attitudes and goal setting lead to higher perception levels, it may in fact actually make those students more attractive to employers.

### **Limitations**

Some recommendations for improving our study as would be to obtain a larger sample size. Of the 177 entries that were submitted, 20 were discarded due to bias and misunderstanding of the study; which limited our findings. This made our data that we obtained not fully representative of the target population (Ontario university students). Our lack of data also made it impossible to correlate the findings of co-op students and make them statistically significant, as only 16 student responses had taken co-op in their university careers. Some further limitations were that our study was to be completed solely on lime survey. We believe that if we could broaden our

target population and distribute surveys in large district areas such as malls and cafeterias more responses would have been rendered. Also by including all degree programs and not limiting respondents to B.Comm students, our group could have gathered more data.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, we believe our study made an accurate examination of students' expectations of obtaining a job that aligns with their course of study. Our findings helped us determine students' perceptions of their first career opportunity and whether their current degree program inhibits them from branching into other fields. We also determined that student perceptions align with reality of obtaining a job in their field and that more students who have done co-op have a potential job opportunities right out of University. Also, academic services have helped students in finishing their degrees.