

What are the Means Used by University Graduates When Looking for Employment?

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This article features results from a research project aimed at studying the professional integration process of university graduates, by analyzing the means they mobilize when looking for employment and preparing for being recruited.

For further details, please consult: Vultur, M. & Imoussaine, M. (2023). *[Les jeunes diplômés universitaires québécois : motifs pour faire des études, moyens pour chercher du travail et perception de la correspondance formation/emploi.](#)* Espace-INRS.

Background

More Difficult Access to the Labour Market and a Weaker Relevance Between Training and Employment

The integration of university graduates into the labour market has been the subject of sustained attention for several years. Various studies, mostly statistical in nature (Council of Canadian Academies, 2021; Vultur, 2021), have shown the difficulties experienced by this segment of the population in securing employment that meets their expectations and corresponds to their academic training. Certain categories of university graduates face, on the one hand, barriers to entering the labour market: they may experience prolonged periods of temporary employment, underemployment or unemployment and may have inadequate remuneration, fewer opportunities and delayed stable professional conditions. On the other hand, the increase in the average level of academic training of young people and the increase in qualification requirements when recruiting workers have led to stronger competition between graduates for jobs intended for them and to a more

pronounced dissociation of the academic training/employment relationship, as reflected in an overqualification rate that reached values exceeding 33% in 2016 (Bourdon, Vultur & Lapointe-Garant, 2023).

Key Concept

What is Recruitment?

Recruitment is a step in the human resource acquisition process where a pool of candidates is created from which the candidate who would provide a superior contribution to the company is selected. It corresponds to a set of activities used to attract candidates and identify signs of their productivity. To become “recruitable” and be recruited, job seekers mobilize various means to highlight their education, experiences and individual qualities (Vultur, 2009).



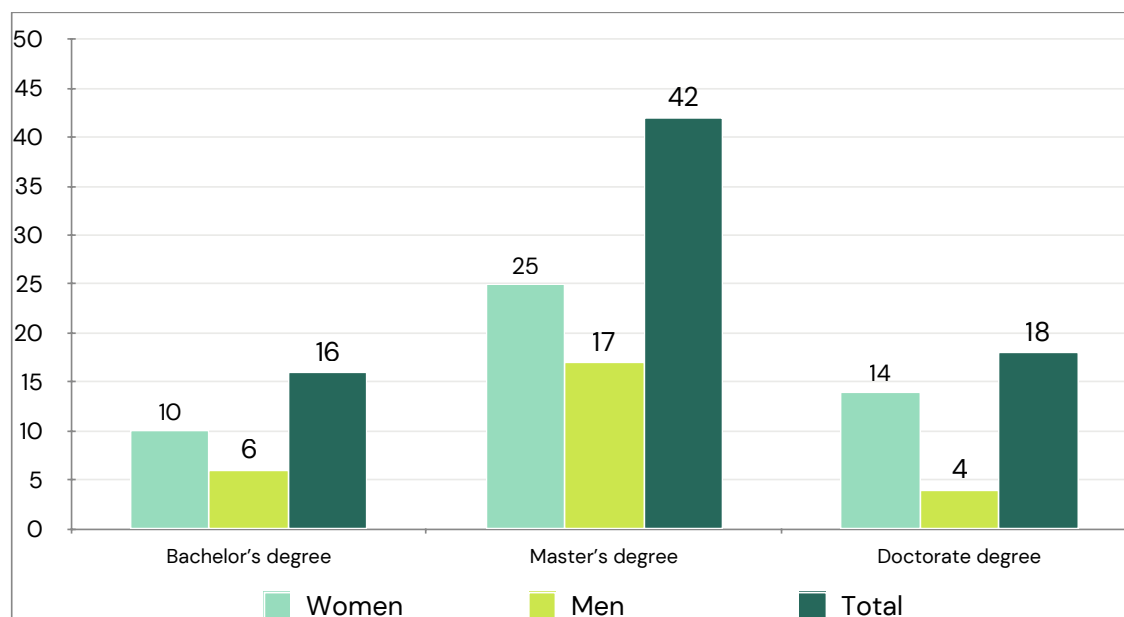
Methodology

A Qualitative Survey of University Graduates

- 🔍 Type of research: Qualitative
- 👤 Study population: 76 people with university degrees, with an average age of 33. Of these people, 49 are women and 27 are men.
- 📍 Place and period of research: Montréal, Sherbrooke and Québec, between 2019 and 2020

More particularly, the sample studied is detailed as follows:

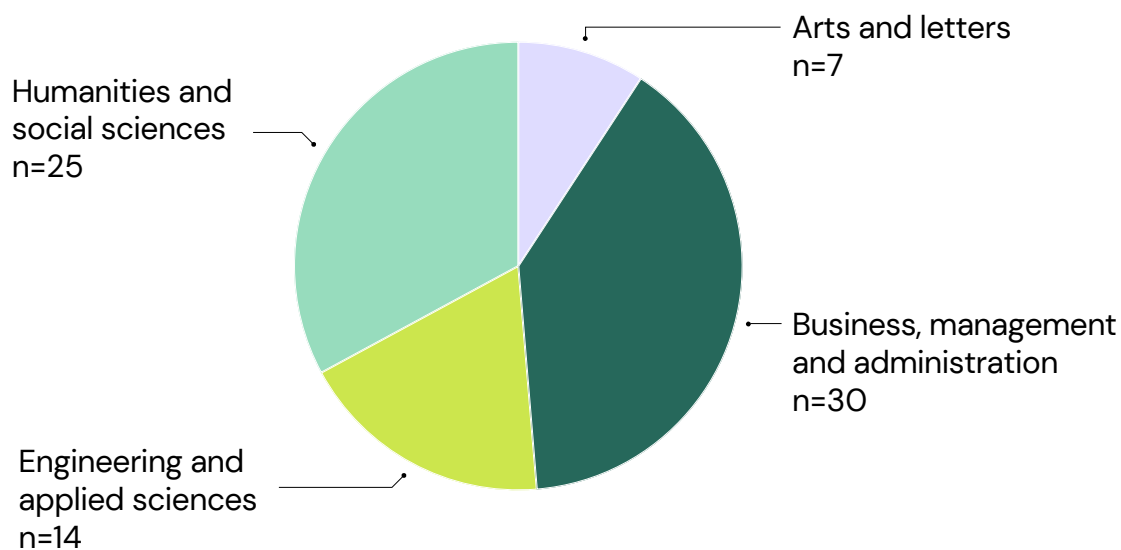
Figure 1.
Level of Education of University Graduates who Participated in the Research



Source: Vultur, M. & Imoussaïne, M. (2023). *Les jeunes diplômés universitaires québécois : motifs pour faire des études, moyens pour chercher du travail et perception de la correspondance formation/emploi*. Espace-INRS.

The breakdown by field of study is as follows:

Figure 2.
Fields of Study of University Graduates who Participated in the Research



Source: Vultur, M. & Imoussaine, M. (2023). *Les jeunes diplômés universitaires québécois : motifs pour faire des études, moyens pour chercher du travail et perception de la correspondance formation/emploi*. Espace-INRS.

Semi-structured interviews on the professional integration journey of graduates were conducted four or five years after their graduation. The analysis of the interviews was inspired by the “grounded theory” approach (Glasser & Strauss, 1973). The data collected from the discourse of graduates served as a starting point for theoretical developments on the phenomenon studied. The “grounded theory” method (Paillé & Mucchielli, 2012) was used to codify, conceptualize and relate qualitative empirical data using the N’Vivo qualitative analysis software.

Results

A Variety of Ways to Look for Employment

Several job search methods were mobilized by the graduates in our research sample. These methods are not mutually exclusive.

1

The mobilization of informal networks and the Internet is important in the search for employment.

The mobilization of informal networks to secure employment is very important among university graduates. Almost half, 37 individuals, followed this method. The Internet, and in particular the professional network *LinkedIn*, is another powerful way to find employment, 32 graduates from our sample used it. With the development of technology, new professional broadcast media are becoming increasingly important in the process of matching supply and demand in the graduate labour market.

2

Internships, professional networks, in-house recruitment and university placement services are other means used when seeking employment.

Several of the graduates, 13 individuals, emphasized that company internships are extremely valuable in the process of getting a job. In particular, they highlighted the value of an internship in one's field of study, constituting a form of pre-professionalization. The professional network developed during the educational pathway and the support of the research director in the case of graduate students play a key role in obtaining employment, this was mentioned by 12 graduates. Job search methods also included university placement services (used by 11 graduates) and "in-house recruitment" following temporary or contractual employment after graduation (9 graduates mentioned this avenue).

3

The massive distribution of resumes is a so-called desperate job search strategy.

The massive distribution of resumes along with the activation of job alerts by email is a practice that was reported by five graduates in our sample. This practice can be described as “desperate” since generally, at the end of their studies, respondents would apply for targeted jobs. However, when these people found themselves either unemployed or in a situation of overqualification over a prolonged period of time, they would adopt this strategy of sending massive amounts of poorly targeted resumes in order to seize the opportunities that arose.

What Can we Learn from our Results?

The Mobilization of Informal Networks, the Use of New Technologies and Internships During Studies are Effective Ways of Seeking Employment

1

University graduates should rely on their informal network to search for work.

The informal network allows graduates to know potential businesses and their personnel needs. This is an asset both for making contacts and for job interviews. This network acts as a “guarantee of competence” that can highlight the qualities related to the behavior and personality of the candidate: relational skills, adaptability, rigor, etc. These qualities do not result from formal learning but are part of a mode of transmission linked to the family culture and the social environment of the graduate. A degree does not guarantee employment. Job seekers must adopt a proactive approach in the search for work that meets their expectations, such as by mobilizing an informal network.

2

The integration of new technologies in seeking employment is essential.

For graduates, the integration of new technologies to secure a job appears to be critical in the context of a virtualized world of work. A *LinkedIn* profile is a virtual resume that needs to be as polished as a regular resume. An individual's professional network profile can be viewed by anyone, thereby allowing for targeted searches and increasing the number of potential job offers received.

3

Internships and the professional experience acquired during studies represent actual value when seeking employment.

Internships that take place during studies represent an important means of securing a job after graduation, in particular because of the value of the experience in the specific field of training that they provide (Bangali, 2022). Program managers and students should give increased priority to internships in the training curriculum. Likewise, getting one's first job, even under contractual or temporary status and with a lower income, is an important step in one's career. From this perspective, the quality of a first job in terms of experience should take precedence over financial considerations.

Courses of Action

- ✓ Connect student populations with resources from the practice community during their studies in order to develop their professional network.
- ✓ Encourage the use of university placement services in order to survey the job market before graduation and promote access to temporary or contractual positions that will prove, in the long term, effective for sustainable professional integration.
- ✓ Offer personalized support to university students in their integration into the labour market, encouraging them to take advantage of their informal network.
- ✓ Offer adapted academic training courses on new digital job search environments, including the creation of digital resumes and professional pages on social networks.

Lines of Research

- ✓ Examine university students' expectations concerning employment after graduation and review the adjustment and retraining strategies that are essential to their professional success.
- ✓ Identify and analyze selection criteria for qualified positions and company hiring practices.

For Further Reading

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Biographical Note

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