

International Students Postgraduate Employment Project

(January 2006 – June 2006)

This Project was funded by the CBDC to identify the issues and barriers that international students face when seeking post-graduate employment, and to facilitate the job search process for international graduates by addressing those issues and barriers.

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Introduction

The HRDA's International Students' Post-Graduate Employment Project was aimed at helping international students find post-graduate employment in the HRM. The objectives of this project were to identify the issues and barriers that international students faced when seeking post-graduate employment, and to facilitate the job search process for new and recent international graduates by addressing those issues and barriers.

To achieve these objectives, the International Students Post-Graduate Employment project was implemented in three phases: information gathering through focus group meetings to allow students to self-identify their needs, training workshops to provide job search skills development, and the hosting of a networking event toward the end of the project to allow students to meet prospective employers.

Summary of Phase 1

The first phase ran from January 21 to March 2, 2006. Focus group meetings were held at Saint Mary's University, Dalhousie University, and Mount Saint Vincent University. These sessions brought together a combined total of 49 international students who identified areas where they experienced barriers to finding employment in Canada and made suggestions for lowering or removing those barriers.

The three meetings followed the same format and used the same discussion questions, so although we met with three different groups of international students, the information gathered can be consolidated into one report.

The discussion questions and a summary of the responses are as follows:

1. *What are your current or intended strategies for finding full or part time post-graduate employment? What have your responses been like so far? What strategies worked for your friends who found employment?*

- A. The five most popular current and intended strategies for finding work are:
 - i. Using internet job search websites such as www.workopolis.ca
 - ii. Using employment centre resources
 - iii. Using contacts made through the University Co-op programs
 - iv. Networking through job fairs, professors and friends
 - v. Liaising with past international students who now have jobs

- B. Students commented that generally, responses have been poor, hence their level of interest in our proposed program.

- C. Students reported that it seemed that most people were using the same channels, but few of them ever had any success with those job search tools.

2. *What difficulties and hurdles have you experienced in seeking post-graduate employment in Canada? If you have not started your job search, what complaints have your friends shared with you about the problems they faced while they were job hunting? What is your suggestion for alleviating each of the issues that you have just mentioned?*

- A. The five most common difficulties and hurdles or complaints identified by students included:
 - i. Lack of connections with potential employers, and difficulties in meeting employers
 - ii. Language barriers or perceived language barriers because of a distinct accent
 - iii. Lack of understanding on the part of employers regarding the process of would-be immigrants acquiring work permits and permanent residency status
 - iv. Too short a period for finding employment after graduation, and too long a waiting period for securing a work permit
 - v. Lack of Canadian work experience since International students are limited to working on campus

- B. Responses from students were all along similar lines. The top five suggestions for addressing those barriers mentioned above:
 - i. Networking opportunities, job fairs that focus on diversity
 - ii. Extension of the three month period of time to find a job after graduation
 - iii. Education for employers

- iv. Incentives for employers such as grants, subsidies, tax breaks
- v. Allow international students to work off campus so they can get Canadian Work experience

3. Which areas within the employment seeking process do you want help with (e.g. resume writing, interview skills training, job search etiquette, etc.)? Where are you planning to find the kind of help that you're looking for? If the HRDA were to organize workshops to provide you with assistance on those subjects you mentioned, what days/times would you recommend for workshops?

- A. During the discussion, students emphasized that all employment processes are important. The five most popular areas of need areas identified were:
 - i. Resume and cover letter writing
 - ii. Interview skills
 - iii. Networking skills
 - iv. Procedure for acquiring a work permit
 - v. General job search skills

- B. Participants indicated that the Internet and their student employment centres would be the main sources of assistance.

- C. Most participants agreed that weekends would be best for holding workshops.

4. What are the reasons why you would or would not immigrate to Nova Scotia? What informational issues and challenges have you encountered regarding the immigration process?

- A. The top five reasons to immigrate to Nova Scotia were:
 - i. Familiarity with the city; students feel comfortable and established after living in Halifax for four years while studying.
 - ii. The feeling that Nova Scotia is a great place to live and that Nova Scotians are nice/friendly people
 - iii. Good social benefits
 - iv. There are better job opportunities in Nova Scotia than at home
 - v. The opportunity to secure a two-year work permit

- B. The top five reasons not to immigrate to Nova Scotia were:
 - i. It is expensive to travel home/faraway
 - ii. There are not enough employment opportunities
 - iii. The process is complicated and there are too many requirements
 - iv. If refused by the government
 - v. Lower wages than other provinces

- C. The informational issues identified were:
 - i. The complicated application processes
 - ii. Misinformation regarding the immigration processes on the part of employers
 - iii. Confusion and misinformation regarding the immigration processes on the part of students

Summary of Phase 2

The second phase of this project ran from March 3 to April 2. The content for the four workshop sessions convened as this phase of the project was selected in direct response to the areas of need identified by the 49 students who participated in the three focus group meetings. These training workshops were held on the weekend of April 1 and 2 at Saint Mary's University. Industry professionals, University Faculty, and University Staff volunteered their time and joined with the HRDA in offering four training sessions addressing: resume and cover letter writing, interview skills, understanding Canadian corporate culture and immigration issues related to post graduate employment.

Participants filled out workshop evaluation forms for each session they attended. These forms asked seven main questions:

1. Was the material covered easy to understand/read?
2. Did this workshop meet your expectations?
3. Was the instructor knowledgeable on the materials presented?
4. Would you recommend this Workshop to others?
5. What did you like the most\least about this Workshop?
6. What are your suggestions for improving this workshop?
7. Do you have any other comments?

An evaluation summary of each workshop session follows.

Workshop 1

Title: Resume and Cover letter Workshop

Facilitator: Cathy Campbell, Career Counsellor, Career and Transition Services, NSCC

Approximate number of workshop participants: 30

Format: Presenter used a PowerPoint Presentation to teach the fundamentals of resume and cover letter writing, and used handouts with examples of resumes and cover letters to help workshop participants understand how to apply what they have learned.

Summary of responses from evaluation forms:

- Participants felt that the workshop was relevant and helpful and met their expectations. They indicated that they would definitely recommend such a workshop to others.

Workshop 2

Title: Immigration Q&A

Facilitator: Elizabeth Campbell, Citizenship and Immigration (CIC) Officer

Approximate number of participants: 30

Format: CIC officer read out the responses to a list of 'frequently asked questions' from a question bank. Students made comments and queries to clarify their understanding of the subject matter.

Summary of responses from evaluation forms:

- Participants were appreciative of the opportunity to meet with a CIC officer, but wanted more information that is specific to work permits and immigration as related to international students wishing to immigrate.

Workshop 3

Title: Interview Skills Workshop

Mock interviews conducted by: Mary Ellen MacEachern (Manager, SMU Employment Centre), Johanne Caron (RBC Recruiter), Dr. Russ Summers (SMU Professor), Tim Perry (NSCC Customized Training), John MacLeod (Finance Coordinator, Dalhousie School of Business Administration), Terra O'Bryan (Senior Associate, Recruiting, Convergys), Shelly Dixon (Senior Recruiter, Convergys), Dr. Martha Gabriel (UPEI Professor), Gerald Gabriel (Executive Director, HRDA).

Approximate number of workshop participants: 30

Format: Each participant had a 20-minute practice interview with one of the professionals listed above. The practice interviewer used an evaluation checklist to assess the participant's responses, then provided immediate constructive feedback. At the end of the interview, the participant kept the evaluation checklist with the comments made by the interviewer to use as a reference when preparing for future interviews.

Summary of responses from evaluation forms:

- The workshop was very practical, and the individual attention and immediate feedback were the most valuable gains from this session.

Workshop 4

Title: Understanding Canadian Corporate Culture

Facilitators: Cynthia Murphy, Director of International Activities at NSCC and Aziz Samarrai, VP of Sales & Marketing, Borderless Solutions

Approximate number of workshop participants: 30

Format: To stimulate discussion, Aziz Samarrai described his experiences as an international student who stayed in Halifax to work after graduating a few years ago. Cynthia Murphy facilitated the discussion by prompting the audience to describe their perceptions of Canadian Corporate Culture. Students divided into groups to discuss and share their views on the main topics listed.

Summary of responses from evaluation forms:

- Workshop participants enjoyed this session because it addressed practical situations that international students face when entering the Canadian Corporate Environment. Participants suggested having more time for this session to allow for more discussion.

Summary of Phase 3

The main event for this final phase was a Networking Lunch held on June 7, 2006 at the Chef's Room in Halifax. This event was organized in conjunction with Rene Robichaud, an employment coach from *Attitude is your Key Coaching*. The event was open to postgraduate international students and immigrants.

Event Format:

- Recruiting staff from Robertson Surette, Capital Health, xwave-Aliant and Clarica were invited to meet with postgraduate international students and recent immigrants from the Information Technology, Science, Human Resources, Accounting and Finance, and Engineering sectors.
- The guest speaker, Leanne Bartlett (Project Officer, Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters) addressed common misconceptions surrounding the hiring processes for postgraduate international students and immigrants.
- The recruiters present spoke briefly about their companies, the types of jobs available, and the kinds of employees they are looking for.
- A networking session followed the lunch and the brief presentations, allowing each participant to meet the recruiters, discuss their areas of interest and hand in their resumes.

Total number of Networking Lunch Participants: 48

Summary of feedback from evaluation forms:

- The guest speaker's presentation was particularly informative and valuable to participants.
- The opportunity to hear the perspectives of employers was beneficial.
- Participants appreciated the chance to personally meet with employers in their fields of study, and felt encouraged by the responses they got from those recruiters.

- One participant summarized the general opinions of the group by stating that it was beneficial to meet potential employers practice networking skills, interview skills and self promotion.
- Participants recommended that the length of time allotted for the networking segment of the event be extended to allow for more time with each recruiter, and increase the probability of meeting all the recruiters.

Appendix A