

Overview: Using Results of the Employment Status Survey

This example shows how the Career Centre, University of Toronto, St. George campus, has used the results of their Employment Status surveys to influence future programming and services.

Since 2007 the Career Centre has been surveying recent graduates between 6-10 months following graduation, to find out their employment status. In the initial survey back in 2007, we added a “comments” section at the end of the survey to provide respondents a place to tell us any additional information that we had not asked.

In 2008, we decided to change the general “Comments” question. In its place, we asked the following 2 questions: (1) “If you had a positive experience using Career Centre services, tell us about it” (2) “If your experience with the Career Centre was negative, we would like to know how we can make or could have made things better.”

Over 400 respondents from the 2010 survey took the time to tell us not only what we did right, but also where we missed the mark. Recent graduates repeatedly praised the following:

- Helpful staff
- Relevant workshops
- Easy to use website
- Variety of Job listings
- Resume services
- Counselling
- Job-shadowing program

Here are a few quotes:

I found all the staff I interacted with very helpful, polite and thorough. The resume clinic staff were especially helpful and always positive and encouraging throughout my job search.

The Career Centre was useful... in terms of the skill building and focus gained. Resume/interview skills, deciding what kind of career was right for me.

Every time I looked for a job in Toronto (rather than my hometown, _____) I ended up find a job using the UofT Career Centre website – and only had to apply to a handful each time.

Good variety of services available

Great source of new grad jobs

Extremely positive experience with the personality workshop and with career counselling

Extern job shadowing program was excellent in providing insight to what I wanted to do later on

I had an amazing experience with the staff at the Career Centre. They knew exactly where to find the information and guide me when I had questions and/or concerns. I also recommend the easy to use Career Centre website, and the integration with the UofT portal. For a student who used the website for a very long time, including summer jobs, the integration was a big pulling factor.

This type of positive feedback helps us to know where we’re on the right track vis a vis certain key services and that we need to maintain that level of excellence.

It is however in the negative feedback where we saw the greatest opportunity for growth. No Career Centre wants to hear that it is doing a poor job in meeting student needs. Even though the very thing one student found positive,

another would site as negative, (e.g. Not enough variety of jobs vs lots of diversity of jobs), certain themes emerged that provided strong arguments for service improvements.

The negative feedback fell along the following lines:

- Lack of awareness of services for recent grads; services not promoted enough
- Information provided was too generic
- There are no jobs for Arts & Science students (on website) – not enough quality and diversity of job listings
- Hard to get appointments
- Not enough for PhDs
- Inconsistent resume feedback from staff
- More targeted job listings

The quotes below capture how a few of the students expressed themselves on this question:

I found the quality of the resume critiques to be very hit and miss.

I feel that all advice given to students are generic. It should instead be catered towards the student's area of study/field. There should be staff that are familiar with the distinctions between each field...

Didn't feel guided, just listened to.

Do more to ensure that graduating students and alumni know what services they are entitled to use. I and many of my friends didn't know we could still use the Career Centre after graduation. Perhaps instead of relying only on Utoronto email, a letter could be sent by mail

This one in particular was blunt and to the point:

I had a terrible experience. I think the results of the Career Centre efforts have been abysmal. There has been no recruitment in my field (economics) and there only seem to be volunteer positions which do not help people with bills to pay..."

Sometimes the advice is quite detailed and thorough. This respondent in particular took about a third of a page to provide feedback. Here is an excerpt:

"My suggestions as to how the Career Centre can improve its services: 1) When a student comes in for advice/help I'd like to see that the counsellor makes additional efforts to contact the student about possible opportunities he/she may have found/seen either on the website or other resources; 2) The counsellor should take time to fully understand what the students career goals are and provide more advice about how to reach these goals; 3) The counsellor should help the student figure out what he/she might want to do, if he/she is undecided; 4) The counsellor should provide direct contact information (networking) for students who may be interested in certain companies or fields (even if just for advice and not for employment)."

In looking back over past surveys, students have told us that they needed career related work experience to be competitive on the job market especially against coop students. That feedback resulted in the creation of a Work Experience Coordinator position whose job it is to help students and recent graduates in finding internships, volunteering and other career related, skill-building experiences.

During 2009/10, the Career Centre, following an internal review, reorganized the employment preparation services, putting more intentional emphasis on coaching. That recent graduates are telling us that advice provided is hit/miss or inconsistent, suggests that we need to ensure our training of staff meets a certain level of professional expertise. To that end, one of our team leaders will be sitting in on all her staff appointments to better assess their level of expertise and then ensuring training for those who are in need of it.

In addition, the feedback by students that they need more targeted services continues to pose a challenge for a Career Centre responsible for providing services for over 52,000 students from over 600 undergraduate, 168 graduate and 42 professional programs. This challenge was thrown out to our team leaders during our annual Spring planning in 2010. What we agreed could be done was to provide targeting within in different ways. Team goals now reflect targeted events for students, especially those within the Faculty of Arts & Science based on year of study (1st, 2nd, 3rd etc), undergraduate/graduate status; and along broad discipline categories like Social Sciences; Government/Law; Arts & Culture. More career labs will be offered in 2010/11 with specific populations of students in mind.

Finally, the work of creating awareness of Career Centre services and keeping our message top of mind for students in a very rigorously demanding academic climate and among a predominantly commuter student population, continues to challenge us – even with a campus user rate of close to 20,000. This work is ongoing.

The above illustration shows how an evaluation tool like an annual employment status survey, by including 2 questions inviting participant feedback, can influence programs and services for current as well as future users of the Centre.

This tool and overview were submitted by the Career Centre, University of Toronto, St George.