

Juggling school and work

Deborah Sunter

A rising proportion of students are juggling full-time studies and employment. In 1980, three out of ten full-time students aged 15 to 24 worked during the school year. In 1990, four of ten students were employed.

While student employment during the summer months enjoys a high level of social and institutional support, the benefits to students of work during the school year are less certain. There is concern that academic achievement may be diminished by work hours that compete for study time, especially when students work long hours at jobs that have little relevance to their school programs ([Stern et al.](#), December 1990). On the other hand, when school and work are successfully combined, students may gain valuable skills that better prepare them for the job market and adult life ([Cohen](#)).

This article examines the incidence of student employment during the school year (September through April), the amount of time spent on the job, and the kinds of jobs that students have. The study focuses on 15 to 24 year-olds in full-time attendance at a high school, college, or university. [\(1\)](#)

School attendance has risen

The number of young people in Canada has fallen dramatically in recent years, reflecting shrinking birth rates that began in the 1960s. There were 1.8 million 15 to 19 year-olds in 1990, down almost half a million from 1980. During the same period, the number of 20 to 24 year-olds dropped 300,000 to 1.9 million. Overall, the youth population fell by 18% over the decade.

In contrast, full-time school attendance among 15 to 24 year-olds increased by 3%, from 1.79 million to 1.84 million, reflecting a pronounced rise in higher education. Growth in the number of students enrolled at universities (49%) and community colleges (13%) more than offset a 10% decline in secondary school enrolment ([Table 1](#)). [\(2\)](#)



Chart **Employment rate of full-time students aged 15 to 24.**

Source: *Labour Force Survey*



Table 1 **Full-time students aged 15 to 24 by educational institution, 1980 and 1990 school years.***

Source: *Labour Force Survey*

* *1980 data are September 1980 to April 1981.*

More students are working

At the beginning of the decade, 31% of full-time students aged 15 to 24 were employed during the school year. The student employment rate fell to 28% at the end of the 1981-82 recession, but recovered quickly in 1983 and resumed an upward trend, reaching a peak of 41% in 1989. The rate slipped to 39% in 1990, as recessionary conditions again dominated the labour market and employment rates fell generally.

The incidence of student employment rose for men and women and for all age groups over the decade, but the largest increase, from 29% to 43%, was among women aged 20 to 24 ([Table 2](#)).



Table 2 **Full-time student employment, 1980 and 1990 school years.***

Source: *Labour Force Survey*

* *1980 data are September 1980 to April 1981.*

Full-time students increased their share of total employment in Canada from 5% in 1980 to 6% in 1990. However, despite rapid growth in the working student population, their share of part-time employment fell slightly (from 33% to 32%), as part-time jobs became more prevalent among older workers.

The steady growth in the employment rate of full-time students suggests that both supply and demand factors have been operating. On the supply side, an increasing number of students may feel a need for an income of their own. Rising education costs may require older students, in community colleges and universities, to seek jobs. On the other hand, employment increases among younger students may reflect their appetite for consumption; as the combination of work and school becomes the norm, the ability to afford the latest consumer items, from clothing to fast food, becomes a peer pressure issue. Finally, the declining youth population has likely reduced job competition.

On the demand side, the rising trend of student employment may reflect increased job creation. Over the last decade, the service sector has grown steadily, causing a greater demand for relatively unskilled part-time workers who are willing to work for low wages. [\(3\)](#)

Student employment rates vary

During the 1990 school year, employment rates among community college students (43%) were somewhat higher than those for secondary (39%) or university students (37%).

The incidence of employment increased with age among students in secondary schools and universities, but it declined slightly among older students in community colleges. In all age/school categories, a greater proportion of women held jobs than men. This difference was especially pronounced among university students ([Table 3](#)).



Table 3 **Full-time student employment rates by educational institution, 1990 school year.***

Source: Labour Force Survey

* *September 1990 to April 1991 averages.*



Chart **Youth employment rates, 1990 school year.***

Source: Labour Force Survey

* *September 1990 to April 1991 averages.*

The highest employment rates of any age/school category were among 17 to 19 year-olds (both men and women) attending secondary school. Almost one-half of this group combined work with full-time studies.

There was considerable variation in the student employment rate by province. In Ontario and Manitoba, 45% of full-time students worked, a higher rate than in any other province. Employment rates were also above average in Alberta and British Columbia. Newfoundland, with only 14% of its full-time students employed had, by far, the lowest rate.

Student employment rates tended to be high in provinces with relatively high employment rates among all 15 to 24 year-olds. However, the incidence of student employment by province was more variable than youth employment. For example, in Newfoundland, the student employment rate was only one-half of the rate for all 15 to 24 year-olds. In contrast, student rates in Ontario and Manitoba were about three-quarters of overall youth employment rates.

... and so do their hours

Full-time students spend an average of 55 hours a week attending classes, studying, and travelling to and from school. [\(4\)](#) In 1990, employed students between the ages of 15 and 24 averaged an additional 13.8 hours per week at work, up slightly from 13.5 hours in 1980.

During the 1990 school year, nearly one-third of employed students put in less than 10 hours per week on the job, while almost one-half worked between 10 and 19 hours. About one in four worked 20 hours or more (and one-quarter of these worked at least 30 hours per week). This distribution has changed little since 1980.

The proportion of students working long hours is related to age. In 1990, only 15% of students aged 15 or 16 worked 20 or more hours per week, compared with 25% of 17 to 19 year-olds and 30% of 20 to 24 year-olds. Within all age/school categories, men were more likely to work long hours than women ([Table 4](#)).



Table 4 **Proportion of employed full-time students working 20 or more hours per week by educational institution, 1990 school year.***

Source: *Labour Force Survey*

* *September 1990 to April 1991 averages.*

The incidence of long workweeks also varied somewhat over the 1990 school year. The proportion of students working 20 or more hours per week was highest in September and December (27%). But, even in the lowest months, February and April, one-fifth of all employed full-time students worked long hours.

Four out of five students work in services or retail trade

Student employment is highly concentrated in services and retail trade C industries characterized by above average proportions of part-time, evening, and weekend work. Some 47% of employed students worked in the service industry in 1990, compared with just 34% of all workers. Although one-half of all student service jobs were in the accommodation, food and beverage industry, this industry accounted for only one-sixth of total employment in services. More than 35% of employed students worked in retail trade, compared with only 18% of all workers.

Student employment was also concentrated in three occupation groups: service (32%), sales (22%), and clerical work (21%). Students were three times more likely to work in service occupations than the overall employed population, and twice as likely to work in sales occupations. Students were under-represented in managerial and professional occupations. In 1990, only 10% of employed students performed this type of work compared with 30% of all workers.



Chart **Student employment in the service industry, 1990 school year.***

Source: Labour Force Survey

* *September 1990 to April 1991 averages.*

Clerical work, which includes cashiers in retail operations, was far more prevalent among women students (29%) than men (12%). In contrast, 12% of men students but just 3% of women worked in primary and processing occupations.

The incidence of managerial and professional positions among students increased with age: 4% among 15 and 16 year-olds, 7% among those aged 17 to 19, and 21% among 20 to 24 year-olds. The incidence of clerical work also increased with age, while the proportion employed in service occupations dropped. Sales work was most prevalent among students aged 17 to 19.

The incidence of long workweeks varied by occupation. Over one-half of students employed as managers

put in 20 or more hours per week, compared with only about one-quarter of those working in professional, clerical, sales or service occupations. Long hours were also somewhat more prevalent (about 30%) among students working in primary occupations, construction trades and transportation equipment operating occupations.



Chart **Student employment by occupation, 1990 school year.***

Source: *Labour Force Survey*

* *September 1990 to April 1991 averages.*

Conclusion

The trend to increased student employment has spurred a number of studies on the relationship between work and academic achievement. Findings from these studies are somewhat contradictory ([Stern et al.](#), March 1990). On the positive side, there is general agreement that students who work while attending school more easily find employment after leaving school. They also tend to earn more than their non-working counterparts, at least in the initial stages of post-school employment.

These short-term gains, however, may be more than offset by longer-term costs. Some researchers have found no demonstrable negative effects of paid work on academic achievement. Others suggest that working students tend to get lower grades and are less likely to complete their academic program or go on to higher education, especially when they work long weekly hours at jobs that are unrelated to their studies. Thus, in the long term, working students may be less able to compete in the labour market than their non-working counterparts.

Notes

Note 1

Data used in this article are from the Labour Force Survey. Each month, respondents to the survey are asked if they attend a school, college or university, and, if so, whether or not they are enrolled as full-time students. The definition of full-time enrolment varies across educational institutions, but generally, full-time students are taking at least 60% of a complete course load. Only those students aged 15 to 24 who were taking credit courses on a full-time basis at a secondary school, community college, or

university were included in this study.

For the purposes of this article, the term "school year" refers to the months of September to April inclusive; school year averages were derived by averaging the monthly estimates for these eight months. For information on trends in student employment during the summer months, see Statistics Canada, January 1992.

Note 2

The number of secondary school students declined during the first half of the decade; since 1986, enrolment has gradually increased as students tend to stay in high school longer. Enrolment in community colleges has shown the opposite pattern. The net increase over the decade reflects growth that occurred during the early eighties; since 1985, the number of students in community colleges has fallen. University enrolment grew steadily from 1980 to 1990, largely because of greater participation by women. During this period, the number of young women attending university full time increased at almost three times the rate for men.

Enrolment estimates presented in this study may vary somewhat from those collected directly from educational institutions and published by the Education, Culture and Tourism Division of Statistics Canada.

Note 3

Young workers accounted for three-quarters of low-paying (minimum wage or less) part-time jobs in 1986. The highest incidence of low-paying work was in the accommodation, food and beverage industry ([Akyeampong](#)).

Note 4

The estimate of "school-related" time use came from the General Social Survey, conducted by Statistics Canada in November and December 1986. The estimate of time spent in school and related activities refers to all full-time students over the age of 15.

References

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Source

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This is the second of five articles in the issue.

[▶ HIGHLIGHTS](#) [▶ TABLE OF CONTENTS](#) [▶ SUBJECT INDEX](#) [▶ AUTHOR INDEX](#) [▶ FRANÇAIS](#)

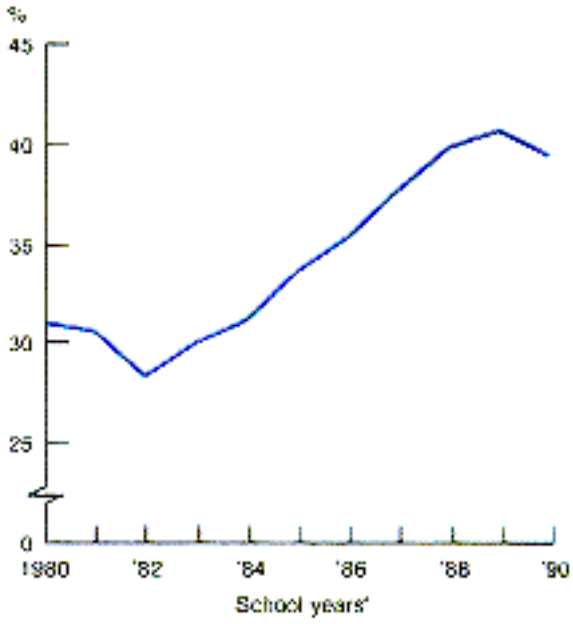
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Employment rate of full-time students aged 15 to 24

More students are combining work and school.



Source: Labour Force Survey

* September to April averages

Table 1

Full-time students aged 15 to 24 by educational institution, 1980 and 1990 school years*

	Full-time students				
	Population 15 to 24	Secondary	Community college	University	Other**
	'000				
1980					
Both sexes	4,554	1,223	279	290	2,762
Men	2,288	631	140	155	1,362
Women	2,266	592	138	135	1,401
1990					
Both sexes	3,749	1,099	315	431	1,904
Men	1,904	581	151	206	966
Women	1,845	519	164	225	937

Source: Labour Force Survey

** 1980 data are September 1980 to April 1981 averages; 1990 data are September 1990 to April 1991 averages.*

*** Includes full-time students in other types of educational institutions, all part-time students and all non-students.*

Table 2

Full-time student employment, 1980 and 1990 school years*

	Employed		Employment rate	
	1980	1990	1980	1990
	'000		%	
Both sexes	551	726	31	39
15-16 years	219	234	27	34
17-19 years	251	307	37	44
20-24 years	81	185	27	39
Men	286	355	31	38
15-16 years	115	117	28	34
17-19 years	127	151	37	43
20-24 years	44	87	26	36
Women	265	371	31	41
15-16 years	104	117	26	35
17-19 years	124	157	37	45
20-24 years	37	98	29	43

Source: Labour Force Survey

** 1980 data are September 1980 to April 1981 averages; 1990 data are September 1990 to April 1991 averages.*

Table 3

Full-time student employment rates by educational institution, 1990 school year*

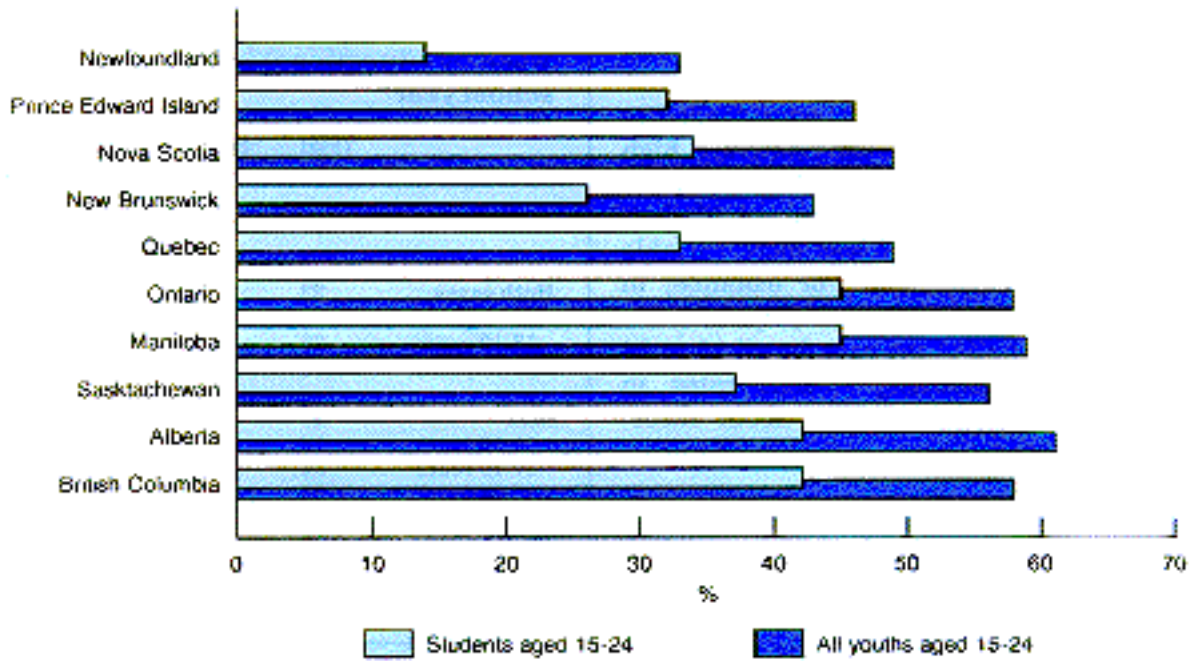
	Total	Secondary	Community college	University
	%			
Both sexes	39	39	43	37
15-16 years	34	35	--	--
17-19 years	44	48	45	32
20-24 years	39	--	42	39
Men	38	39	43	33
15-16 years	34	34	--	--
17-19 years	43	46	44	27
20-24 years	36	--	42	34
Women	41	40	43	41
15-16 years	35	35	--	--
17-19 years	45	50	45	35
20-24 years	43	--	42	44

Source: Labour Force Survey

** September 1990 to April 1991 averages*

Youth employment rates, 1990 school year*

Student employment rates tend to reflect the overall youth labour market.



Source: Labour Force Survey

* September 1990 to April 1991 average

Table 4

Proportion of employed full-time students working 20 or more hours per week by educational institution, 1990 school year*

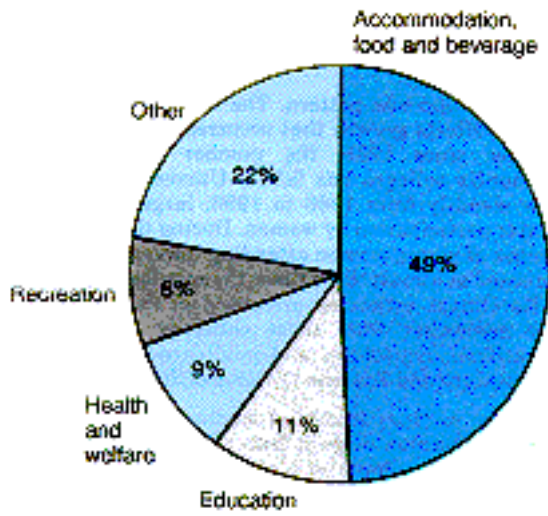
	Total	Secondary	Community college	University
	%			
Both sexes	23	20	28	27
15-16 years	15	15	--	--
17-19 years	25	26	26	20
20-24 years	30	--	30	29
Men	27	24	33	30
15-16 years	18	18	--	--
17-19 years	31	31	32	26
20-24 years	33	--	35	31
Women	19	16	23	24
15-16 years	13	13	--	--
17-19 years	19	20	21	16
20-24 years	27	--	26	27

Source: Labour Force Survey

** September 1990 to April 1991 averages*

Student employment in the service industry, 1990 school year*

Half of all student service jobs are in the accommodation, food and beverage industry.

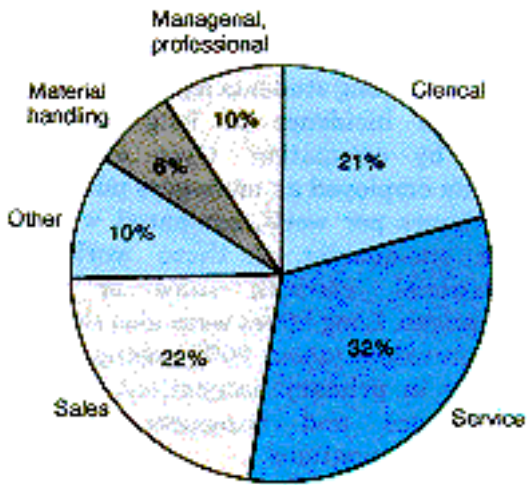


Source: Labour Force Survey

* September 1990 to April 1991 averages

Student employment by occupation, 1990 school year*

Most students work in service, sales or clerical jobs.



Source: Labour Force Survey

* September 1990 to April 1991 averages