



THE DIVERSE CAREER PATHS OF  
EDUCATIONAL STUDIES ALUMNI

# Looking Back, Moving Forward Guided by Alumni Voices: Concluding Thoughts

AUTHOR: MARY KOSTANDY

GRAPHIC DESIGNER: JUNYI (ELLA) XUE

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# Concluding Thoughts

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The Initiative report examines the career experiences of EDST alumni and provide valuable insights about how the EDST programs supported them in their career paths as well as how it can better support the current graduate students in their diverse career paths. The findings highlight that EDST programs' learning content has been helpful to alumni across sectors, decades and program concentrations.

## Alumni's experiences and career expectations differ across degrees

The report's findings (including **the quantitative report**) clearly indicate that alumni end up in a range of diverse careers. That said, alumni of different programs differ in their career interests and experiences, a fact that requires a more careful consideration within EDST. EdD alumni are often quite satisfied with their degrees and the reflections it offered them on their practice. The majority were already in established education leadership positions prior to program entry. PhD alumni in academic careers recognize and appreciate the skills and knowledge they have gained and how well prepared they were for tenure track positions. However, PhD and MEd alumni who were interested in careers outside of academia seemed to be more disappointed regarding their career readiness.

For **MEd alumni**, we see that their expectations for career readiness is in line with the purpose of the MEd, which is "**designed for those students whose primary interest is in developing further their professional practice [emphasis added]**" (EDST website). In contrast, the MA is designed for students "interested in learning more about conducting research, and who may enter the PhD program" (EDST website). In spite of different emphases in the purpose of those two degrees, students in both programs attend more or less the same courses. This observation makes us wonder if, in practice, there is any substantial difference in the students' experiences in those two degrees. It seems that supporting MEd students' readiness for professional practice may be largely lacking within EDST.

In contradistinction, the **PhD alumni's expectations for support in preparing for careers beyond the professoriate do not seem to fit with the department's view about the purpose of PhD program, as expressed in the latest PhD self-study report of March 2021.** A vast mismatch is observed between PhD alumni concerns and aspirations and the need for career support, as also reflected in the latest PhD self-study report. Despite drawing on the experiences of only two students and two alumni, the PhD self-study report acknowledges the need for: 1) "more opportunities for professional development such as workshops and careers within and beyond academia;" 2) "more up-to-date information about the academic job market including publication requirements, unwritten protocols;" and 3) "creating opportunities to network both inside and outside of academia to get a better sense of what opportunities are available and how people have found success after graduation." Furthermore, while the self-study report suggests strategies for rethinking the PhD program, particularly its curriculum, nothing to date has been made to address that gap in supporting non-academic careers. In fact, it conceptualizes "non-academic career skills" as being primarily research-based (e.g., conducting independent research, managing research teams, and mobilizing knowledge).

### Should doctoral programs prepare students for “non-academic” careers?

Interestingly, the PhD self-study report raises the questions: **Does the EDST PhD program prepare students for non-academic careers? If not, should it?** We hope that findings from this report (and from the Career Paths Initiative in general) would help provide a response to these questions and hopefully reinvigorate the conversation as to whether EDST ought to play a bigger role in supporting students in their diverse careers. This point is aligned with Santa Ono's observations at the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies' symposium, *Reimagining the PhD*: "It is an ethical and moral responsibility of universities and the leaders of these institutions to ensure that we somehow calibrate and align the output of our graduate students with opportunities that exist for them post-graduation." It is not sufficient to attend issues related to the diversity of students (in terms of background, ability, identity, socio-economic status, etc.). It is also crucial for programs (and the university as a whole) to attend to the diversity of career aspirations and needs of students as a form of inclusive teaching. In the same symposium, it was reported that the "key challenge emerging from the *Imagining Canada's Future* project was the necessity of developing 'new ways of learning to meet the needs of an evolving society and labour market.'" There is an obvious mismatch between graduate programs, students' needs and society's needs that requires more synching and calibration. Interestingly, students' suggestions for changes to meet the *Imagining Canada's Future* project are in line with the alumni surveyed in the current initiative and who call for an "increase [in] opportunities for experiential and work-integrated learning." On that point, Gobel (quoted in the symposium report) noted that "more and more young people are looking for educational experiences and careers where they can make a difference and contribute to society." Moving forward, she said, it will be essential for educators, governments and businesses to work more closely together to imagine a 21st century curriculum.

# Conclusion

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In conclusion, we are truly grateful for this opportunity to listen to the EDST alumni's important voices, which span 40 years of history of the EDST and its preceding entities. While this Initiative represents a milestone, we believe there is still much work to be done to address those concerns. What is clear for this project's team is that for real change to address alumni and students' needs, reconceptualizing different aspects of the EDST graduate programs cannot be separated from concerns regarding alumni career pathways and aspirations, particularly as these become increasingly diverse. For EDST programs to support students in their diverse career paths, an enhanced practical approach to learning should be embraced, creating space through experiential learning that generates meaningful connections between educational theories and field practices. Alumni experiences, especially those in work sectors outside academia, should be valued, celebrated and resourced to collaborate with the faculty in supporting the mentoring of graduate students about diverse career pathways. EDST faculty and graduate students need to deliberate on the meaning, purpose and scope of career support. Such deliberation is crucial if the notion of a career is not to be viewed from the narrow lens of teaching job skills. Instead, deliberation should engage a decolonizing and inclusive approach that welcomes and resourcefully supports students who may be interested in diverse careers within and outside academia.

## References

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