



THE DIVERSE CAREER PATHS OF  
EDUCATIONAL STUDIES ALUMNI

# Future Work: Recommendations for UBC

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As a starting premise, I don't think there is a one-size-fits-all model that applies to every department. If this Initiative has exhibited some success in our department, that doesn't mean it would work for other departments (or that they need it to start with). It all depends on the field of study, the context of work possible, the needs of grad students, the experiences of alumni and the interest of faculty and program leaders.

While the model itself might change to suit one place or another, I hope that the underlying principle—which was the key message of our video—remains. That principle is to create more extensive spaces of alumni engagement that would support becoming more inclusive of students' diverse career aspirations and to make more visible to students the breadth of avenues possible and ways to get there. Also, I hope there would be more space to reflect on what "meaningful contributions" means to them and to add nuance to the many complex factors that can shape one's career choices beyond one's education and training.

Before rushing to suggest that aspects from this Initiative may be needed across departments, I think one would first need to survey the ground to know what is there and where gaps exist in relation to the status of supporting students in thinking about career diversity and meaningful contribution. Five key pieces stand out to me as starting points:



## 1

## Survey graduate students about their career aspirations

Thanks in great part to Jacqui's grad update email, we had graduate students from across the university register for our events.[1] This includes students from arts, chemical and biological engineering, chemistry, Earth ocean sciences, forestry, health education, health sciences, history, land and food systems, the School of Community and Regional Planning and the Faculty of Medicine, including ophthalmology and visual sciences, audiology and speech sciences, in addition to students from other departments across the Faculty of Education with many from the BEd Teacher Education program. Given this broad interest in the elements of this Initiative, it would be interesting to learn more about what attracted them to this event and what kind of support they currently have in their own departments in learning about diverse careers. It would also be interesting to learn about the career aspirations of graduate students in the EDST and beyond. Some key questions include:

- What career aspirations do graduate students have, particularly PhD students?
- Did those aspirations change over the course of their program? What influenced them and in what ways?
- To what extent do they feel they can discuss their career aspirations with their professors or other graduate students? Why or why not?
- Are they seeking an academic career? Why or why not? During their program, did they become more attracted to or deterred from the idea of pursuing an academic career? What influenced that change? In other words, has their interest—or lack thereof—in an academic career changed during their time in the program?[2]
- To what extent do they feel that their program is supporting them in pursuing those career aspirations? And perhaps, do they think it is the role of their program to do so in the first place?
- Whether this research can be conducted by a GSS or G+PS.

**2**

## **Interview alumni about their initial years after graduation**

It would also be interesting to have more in-depth interviews and conversations with alumni. Through our survey, many alumni have generously shared their experiences. In addition to that, I was also touched by the few who reached out and were keen to chat more about their experiences. I wonder about the experience of graduates in the initial years after graduation for alumni across the university, especially in terms of how alumni think about their careers and how their thinking evolves as they navigate the labour market.

**3**

## **Mapping the terrain of internal career services and career education in departments across campus and alumni engagement to support the relevance of graduate education**

It would be very illuminating to learn and map what different departments and or faculties are doing in terms of career services and/or career education, if anything. To my mind, career services and education can include internships, coops, mentorships programs, panels and events, inviting alumni as guest speakers in class, amongst other things. I know some units have a dedicated career centre, such as the School of Business, and others may have a career strategist like the Faculty of Land and Food Systems. Some are keen on researching where their alumni work, such as the School of Public Policy and Global Affairs. Some have an annual career fair within their department. The Public Humanities Hub and Arts Amplifier offers a variety of services and resources. I wonder what the different models are and where there seem to be gaps that students and alumni could identify. What could be learned from models and platforms that are already in use? Some faculties may already be doing fantastic work. For example, the Faculty of Land and Food Systems seems to have had a solid ongoing alumni mentorship program in place for decades. Different models also can depend largely on the field of education and work.

On a more systemic and structural level, I wonder—along the lines Dean Porter’s key point in our initiative video—what departments and/or faculties are doing in terms of engaging alumni in the conversation about the purpose of graduate programs and inviting them to support shaping their course offerings.

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## A university-wide working group on career diversity

At the forefront of this work, I imagine a working group—to borrow Andre’s idea—that includes students and alumni across multiple disciplines. Danielle had mentioned an interest expressed by some students in history and other departments to lead similar work in their own context. I also know the Public Humanities Hub is doing great work that is student-lead. I think there is room for departments to learn from each other and share their experiences to support a more inclusive and fulfilling learning environment for all graduate students.



## 5

## Taking pride in alumni's diverse accomplishments



Danielle Barkley mentioned that she heard some alumni express the view that departments "aren't proud of them" unless they've made academic accomplishments. She touched on the need for alumni to feel valued and celebrated, regardless of their career paths. I hope that through this work, there will continue to be opportunities for the departments and the university to take pride in their alumni's diverse accomplishments.

Gabriella Maestrini, an EDST PhD alumni, once said that a students' portfolio, in terms of research and work, is part of the department portfolio. I agree, and I would extend view that to the alumni's portfolio as well. The quest to learn about our alumni is like learning about the department's "ancestors." It's a form of intergenerational knowledge that feeds back to the department, faculty, and university to create a richer story of who we are—as students, as graduates, as staff, and as faculty—and who we can be.

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[1] Unfortunately, we only captured registrants' faculties/departments starting our third event. For the first two, we had a drop-down list of FoE departments and "other" for outside FoE.

[2] The reason I ask is that several alumni identified work-life balance as the main reason they are disinterested in pursuing a tenure track position. It is quite interesting that in a Ph.D. program, students are preparing for an academic career while also witnessing the lack of work-life balance in many of their professors' lives, which can put them off this path. Especially as they are mindful that, given the current dearth of opportunities, they have to work much more (and give up much more) to secure a position to start with.