



THE DIVERSE CAREER PATHS OF
EDUCATIONAL STUDIES ALUMNI

Executive Summary

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AUTHORS

Mary Kostandy, Initiative Lead: PhD Candidate, Educational Studies (EDST), Faculty of Education (FoE), UBC

Oladipupo Ogunfeibo, Research Associate: (EDST MEd, 2020), PhD Student, Educational Studies, Faculty of Education, UBC

GRAPHIC DESIGNER

Junyi (Ella) Xue, Undergraduate student, Bachelor of Media Studies, UBC

CONTRIBUTORS

We would like to acknowledge the generous support of the Initiative team members in reviewing the report.

Alison Taylor, Professor, EDST, FoE, UBC

André Mazawi, Department Head, EDST, FoE, UBC

Danielle Barkley, Graduate Career Educator, The Centre for Student Involvement & Careers, UBC

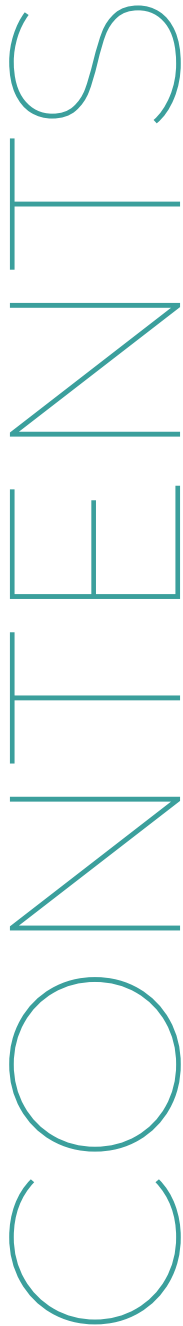
Deirdre Kelly, Professor, EDST, FoE, UBC

Jacqui Brinkman, Director, Graduate Student Professional Development, Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, UBC

Jude Walker, (EDST PhD, 2011), Associate Professor, EDST, FoE, UBC

Michael Murphy, Associate Director, Alumni Engagement, FoE, UBC

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Executive Summary

At UBC, we talk about the centrality of inclusion: inclusion of Black, Indigenous and other people of colour; women; queer; and differently-abled people. The Diverse Career Paths of EDST Alumni Initiative is also interested in inclusion – of students who have differing career aspirations, especially beyond the professoriate or the academy narrowly defined. The Initiative supports EDST students in exploring diverse career pathways and taking stock of EDST's own alumni, their journeys and career experiences.

This two-year student-led Initiative stemmed from the interests of EDST students – expressed to peer advisors – in learning more about “non-academic” careers. [Learn more about **our story**](#). The team was composed of a PhD candidate, an alum and PhD student, a department head, three faculty members, and three staff members. [Learn more about **our team**](#).

During this Initiative, we created:

- [71+ Alumni profiles](#)
- [13 Alumni stories](#)
- [12 "Career Journey" videos](#)
- [3 "Spotlight on Alumni Careers" panel recordings](#)
- [A career resources page](#)

Learn more about our work and the Initiative's reach in "**Initiative in Numbers**," our first report (p. 11). You can also visit our [website](#) for a repository of resources created and events organized.

We've engaged with a heterogenous body of over 300 EDST alumni across degrees, program areas, and work sectors as part of the initiative. It was crucial for us to ensure a broad representation across identity lines. Learn more about the values and rationale underpinning our work in our [FAQ page](#) and [Initiative video](#). Our [Initiative video](#) also expands on our views on career diversity and why we believe it is an essential element of inclusive education.

As part of the Initiative, we surveyed 289 EDST alumni participants who graduated from 1968 to 2020 across four graduate degrees (PhD, EdD, MA, & MEd) about where they work. Read our quantitative report, "**A Snapshot of EDST Alumni Careers**" (p. 15) for an overview of our main findings. Read our qualitative report, "**Alumni's Experiences and Recommendations**" (p. 24) to learn more about how the EDST programs supported alumni in their diverse careers and what recommendations alumni have for the department and faculty.

During UBC Homecoming 2022, we celebrated the end of the Initiative. The graduate and postdoctoral studies dean and vice-provost, the Faculty of Education dean pro tem, the educational studies department head, and the Initiative team members shared their lessons learned and their vision going forward. [Watch a recording of the speeches from our final event, "Looking Back, Moving Forward."](#) Read the Initiative lead's **Concluding Reflections** (p. 42) and her **Recommendations for UBC** (p. 46).

I. Key Findings

a Alumni Engagement

Over 55% of surveyed alumni expressed interest in being involved with graduate students and their department.



b EDST Alumni Employment

- The top employment sector for PhD, EdD, and MA graduates is Higher Education. The top employment sector for MEd graduates is K–12, followed by Higher Education.
- 24% of alumni hold a second job, with the majority being self-employed.
- Within the Higher Education sector, the percentage of PhD alumni holding professorial positions decreased by 35% between the alumni graduating from the 2000s and those who graduated in the 2010s, while the percentage of PhD alumni holding staff positions in Higher Education increased by 30%. This corresponds to the increasing level of management and professional (M&P) staff positions in universities. For example, at UBC M&Ps make up close to one-third of the university workforce (Vered, 2019).
- All six Indigenous doctoral alumni in Higher Education work in professorial positions.
- Doctoral alumni who identify as not belonging to a visible minority group (i.e., not a person of colour) are 1.44 times more represented in professorial positions than their counterparts.



Alumni's Experiences and Feedback

- We found that alumni are incredibly grateful to their programs, particularly for their grounding in critical and social justice theories, which have informed their outlook in life and in their work practices across diverse sectors.
- We also found that alumni are diverse, not only as a non-homogenous body, and not only in the diversity of their career paths, but also with respect to their career stages and their reasons for enrolling in graduate school. All of these factors contributed to the alumni's expectations regarding career support: what it is, if it is needed and why it is needed.
- Several alumni warned against orienting the programs "towards a narrow focus on job skills" (a 2000s PhD alum working in the government) or "vocational purpose" (a 2010s MEd alum working in higher education). At the same time, many alumni were troubled by "the valuing of academic pursuits above all others." A PhD alum from the '10s who works in the nonprofit sector writes, "to better prepare students for diverse career paths, these paths should be held up as legitimate and valuable career options and not some sort of 'second place' career."
- Unsurprisingly, the most cited reason for the need for more career support was the dearth of tenure-track postsecondary positions. There was also concern that tenure-track positions are particularly scarce for equity-seeking groups, "especially for migrant students of colour who have academic aspirations but do not have much local networks/resources" (a '20s PhD alum working in Higher Education).



- There also seemed to be a strongly expressed need to attend to the diversity of career aspirations that students may have as well as “more consideration that not all graduates (especially PhD students) want to pursue an academic and/or tenure stream position.” This finding is in line with the “Degrees of Success” report, which pointed out that an “academia-first” mentality can hinder PhD graduates’ labour market transition (Council of Canadian Academies, 2021).
- Alumni’s experiences and expectations for career support differed across degrees. MA and EdD alumni were often quite satisfied with their programs. EdD in particular are often quite fulfilled with their degree and the reflections it offers them on their practice, though it should be noted that EdD alumni tend to be in established education leadership positions prior to program entry. PhD alumni in academic careers recognize and appreciate the skills and knowledge that they have gained and how well prepared they have become for tenure-track positions. MEd alumni are often grateful for the breadth of critical knowledge they have gained, which is relevant to their diverse careers. However, PhD and MEd alumni interested in careers outside of academia seem to be most vocal regarding the desire for stronger career readiness. MEd alumni seek more practical learning opportunities, practicum placements, and more connection of theory-to-practice. PhD alumni seek more recognition of the diversity of their career aspirations, as well as more support and valuing of careers beyond the professoriate.

Key Recommendations

While alumni made many of the following recommendations to their department, a lot can be gained by pooling efforts across the faculty and by collaborating with other UBC units.

a Recommendations for EDST

- Practical learning opportunities and praxis-oriented instructional approaches that connect theory to educational practice
- Practicum placements and sharing of relevant job opportunities
- Organizing career-related events and inviting professionals as guest speakers in class
- Networking opportunities with professionals and alumni, as well as with graduate students who are in different programs and/or different career stages
- More mentorship of graduate students by alumni and faculty
- Connecting graduates with the department post-graduation

b Recommendations for the Education Faculty

- Hiring a career strategist who can facilitate organizing events, provide career guidance, meet students' diverse career needs, and support the establishments of career mentorship and practicum–placement opportunities
- Organizing career fairs to connect students with potential employers

The following recommendations are made by the Initiative team for future work at UBC.

c Recommendations to UBC

- Conducting more research about the employment and feedback of alumni from other Faculty of Education units and other faculties
- Surveying graduate students about their career aspirations
- Interviewing alumni about their initial years after graduation
- Mapping the terrain of internal career services and career education in departments across campus and alumni engagement to support the relevance of graduate education
- Forming a university-wide working group on career diversity. Departments can learn from each other and share their experiences to support a more inclusive and fulfilling learning environment for all graduate students.
- Surveying PhD graduates after the introduction of [the minimum funding requirement in 2018](#), which impacted the PhD program admissions and student experience. New cohorts of PhD students are likely to differ in some ways from those who came before.
- Taking pride in and celebrating alumni's diverse accomplishments

Conclusion

Findings from the **Snapshots of EDST Alumni Careers** (quantitative) report and the **EDST Alumni's Experiences and Recommendations** (qualitative) report reveal the importance of rethinking the purpose of graduate education. Such a rethinking is imperative if graduate students are to be adequately supported in their exploration of diverse interests and potentials. While graduate education goes beyond narrow vocational aims, it cannot shy away from considering equally meaningful and viable ways of being in the world and contributing to society. PhD students, MEd students, and those affiliated with racialized and marginalized groups express the strongest need for additional career support given the complex dynamics of labour markets.

Acknowledgements

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ALE: Adult Learning Education

ALGC: Adult Learning and Global Change

CULE: Curriculum and Leadership

EDAL: Educational Administration and Leadership

EDST: Department of Educational Studies

FoE: Faculty of Education

HIED: Higher Education

SCPE: Society Culture Politics and Education



The Diverse Career Paths of Educational Studies Alumni

<https://edst.educ.ubc.ca/diversecareers>

EDST.diversecareers@ubc.ca

Department of Educational Studies,
University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

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