

A Comparative Exploration of Post-Graduation Educational Mobility for College, Institute and University Graduates

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Research Domains

Student Access and Experience (SAE)

Abstract

Broader mandates permitting more higher education institutions (HEIs) to grant undergraduate degrees have expanded access to degree-level education, and thus are promoted as improving students' career and economic prospects. However, most research on graduates from HEIs with newer degree-granting mandates has focused on economic outcomes such as post-graduation salaries. A relatively underexplored outcome is the further education pursued by graduates from different types of HEIs, specifically graduates with undergraduate degrees in similar subjects. We compare the post-graduation educational choices of baccalaureate graduates with similar or identical degrees from colleges, institutes, and universities. Our analysis indicates that graduates with similar degrees who undertake further education enroll in different types of programs. Their choices may be constrained by availability of options, by their perceptions of the utility of different options, or by external perceptions of the comparative quality of degrees from different types of HEIs.

Full paper

Introduction

In recent decades, some jurisdictions have expanded access to higher education by allocating degree-granting status to higher education institutions (HEIs) other than universities. Undergraduate degree recipients generally have higher post-graduation earnings than diploma or certificate graduates (Skolnick, Wheelahan, Moodie, Liu, Adam, & Simpson, 2018), thus, wider access to baccalaureate-level education has been promoted as a method of improving students' career and economic prospects (Hurley & Sá, 2013).

However, research comparing post-graduation outcomes of baccalaureate degree holders from different types of HEIs mostly focuses on economic outcomes, and usually only looks at graduate degree programs as further education options. Baccalaureate graduates from colleges with recent degree-granting status may earn more after graduation than university degree graduates; university baccalaureate graduates are also more likely to enroll in graduate degree programs than college baccalaureate graduates (Frenette, 2019).

Access to further education after graduation is important for undergraduate degree holders seeking additionally career opportunities, and is also important for HEIs in supporting the post-graduation paths of their graduates. Our study contributes to the body of research in this area in two ways. First, we examine post-graduation enrollment in programs such as professional certifications and post-degree certificates and diplomas, as well as in graduate degree programs. Second, rather than simply comparing baccalaureate graduates across different types of HEIs, we compare graduates by type of HEI and by the subject or type of undergraduate degree the graduates obtained.

Methodology

Our analysis uses post-graduation data from students in the Canadian province of British Columbia (BC). We use data from a single province because college degree programs are not structured identically in all Canadian provinces. Our data are from BC's Baccalaureate Graduates Survey (BGS), which collects data from graduates two years after their graduation; our data set represented 12,989 respondents who graduated between 2010 and 2015. The BGS collects data on graduates' enrollment in six different post-

graduation educational options: another undergraduate degree, master's degree, doctoral degree, professional certification, undergraduate-level certificate or diploma, and post-degree certificate or diploma. We only used data from graduates of similar or identical degree programs offered at every type of HEI.

Results

More university than college/institute graduates enrolled in further education within two years of graduation. More university graduates than college or institute graduates enrolled in or completed master's or doctoral programs. This difference may be due to access to graduate programs rather than to students' academic preparation or aspirations. Only one BC institute and four BC teaching-intensive universities offer graduate degrees, so graduates from research-intensive universities may have more opportunity to pursue graduate studies at the same institution where they obtained their bachelor's degree.

More college/institute graduates than university graduates enrolled in or completed a professional association certification or a post-graduate certificate or diploma. There were also more college/institute graduates than university graduates studying part-time rather than full-time.

In every subject area, the percentage of university graduates pursuing post-graduation education was larger than the percentage of college/institute graduates. There were also differences by subject in the choice of post-graduation education. Arts and science graduates were more likely to enroll in master's programs, and business graduates were more likely to enroll in professional certification programs. College/institute business graduates chose this option more often than university business graduates.

Our analysis was limited by not having access to raw data because of privacy regulations. Thus we were not able to determine statistically significant differences between categories, or whether variables such as age or gender identity related to graduates' choices.

Discussion

Our results indicate at least two areas worthy of future investigation. First, post-secondary educational choices may be constrained by the options available in graduates' geographic area, even for graduates with equivalent undergraduate qualifications. This constraint may especially affect graduates earning relatively lower pay rates, since they may not have the economic resources to move elsewhere to pursue further education. If online education choices become more prevalent post-COVID, geographic constraints could become less influential – but only if the program that a student desires is available online and is accessible to them.

Second, graduate degree programs should not be the only measure of post-graduation education. Other post-secondary programs matter, too. Graduates from different types of educational institutions enroll in different types of post-graduation programs, and post-graduation education choices may differ between graduates in different disciplines. To fully support graduates in their post-graduation educational journeys, researchers and institutions must acknowledge that these journeys encompass more than enrollment in graduate degree programs.

References

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