How Well Is Higher Education Preparing Students for Particular Careers?: Report on the Findings of a Study of Employees of NGOs in Ontario that Advance Human Rights

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As university professors, we are aware that many of our students are concerned about how their experiences at university will prepare them for paid employment after graduation. While I believe the university serves its social purpose best by retaining its focus on education, not training, it does strike me as worthwhile to ask whether there are ways we could increase the practical applicability of our curricula and pedagogy without sacrificing our principles. I think this is especially important when considering our undergraduates for whom the Bachelors will be a terminal degree.

This paper reports and reflects upon some of the results of a survey I recently conducted as program coordinator for the Human Rights & Human Diversity program at the Brantford campus of Wilfrid Laurier University. As the main aim of the survey was to enhance that program's structure and delivery, it was directed at individuals working for Ontario-based nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that advance human rights. Respondents were asked a range of questions, some concerning how well institutions of higher education are preparing students for careers in their sector. While the focus of this research was definitely on human rights and NGOs, the findings I review here should be of interest to faculty who teach in the social sciences and humanities. In fact, they should be of particular interest to faculty who teach political science because fully 48 (23%) of 207 respondents who answered a question concerning their educational background, indicated they had majored in Political Science, Political Economy, Public Administration, or International Affairs/Relations at the undergraduate or graduate level or both.

As for organization, the paper begins by describing the survey and its limitations. It then discusses a set of questions that concerned the value of certain skills and competencies and how they were developed. This flows into further discussion of how formal education and

extracurricular activities appear to be contributing to graduates' ability to perform in their jobs as well as how this contribution might be enhanced. The general conclusion of this analysis and discussion, we shall see, is a cautious recommendation that we consider proceeding intentionally to add courses and assignments to our programs designed to supplement certain cooperative and interpersonal skills that this research suggests students are not developing through our programs today and to encourage students to become involved in extracurricular activities as part of their overall undergraduate education.

1. Survey Method and Limitations

This paper reports upon selected results from an online survey that was conducted using Survey Monkey from August 2010 to January 2011. The survey was directed at staff and executive directors of Ontario-based nongovernmental organizations that advance human rights.

The survey was conducted using a two-step non-probabilistic snowball-type sampling method. In the first step potential respondents were identified in one of three ways. i) NGOs that might fit the requirements of the study were identified using standard internet searching techniques and then further potential NGOs were drawn from lists posted on their websites.[1] ii) Further NGOs were identified by conducting a search using Wilfrid Laurier University's electronic subscription to Associations Canada. iii) A few additional individuals and NGOs were voluntarily suggested by respondents. Together, these produced the names of more than 1000 organizations.

Information from each of these organizations' websites was then reviewed to determine if the organization fit the purpose of this survey. An organization was considered "Ontario-based" if it met one of the following criteria: all of its operations were located in Ontario; it's headquarters was in Ontario; or it had an office or offices in Ontario. In all cases, surveys were only directed to staff located in Ontario. An NGO was considered to "advance human rights" if it made claims in certain sections of its website (e.g., home page, "About Us," "Who We Are," "Mission," "Vision," "Principles," "What We Do, "Projects," etc.) that indicated at least one of four things: that advancing human rights is or is *part of* its core purposes; that it uses human rights to advance its core purposes; that it justifies its core purposes, at least in part, in terms of human

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[1] The following represent the main lists that were consulted:

- CharityVillage.com's "Nonprofit Neighbourhood": http://www.charityvillage.com/cv/nonpr/index.asp (May 20, 2010).
- Human Rights Research and Education Centre (University of Ottawa) "Human Rights Organizations, NGOs": www.cdp-hrc.ca/eng/doc/can-web/nogscan_e.php (May 2, 2010).
- the Canadian Race Relations Foundation "Links—NGO": http://www.crr.ca/content/view/479/563/lang,english/ (May 12, 2010)
- Canadian Heritage, "Human Rights Program—Links": www.pch.gc.ca/pgm/pdp-hrp/liens-links/index-eng.cfm (May 2, 2010).
- Ontario Council for International Cooperation, "Organization Members": http://ocic.on.ca/Page.asp?IdPage=6720&WebAddress=ocic (April 12, 2010).
- Canadian Council for International Co-operation, "Who's Who": www.cici.ca/whoswho/ (May 14, 2010).
- Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies, "Affiliations and Other Organizations": www.elizabethfry.ca/eaffiliates.php (May 14, 2010).
- Canadian International Development Agency, "Partners (Voluntary Sector)": Home > Working with CIDA > Canadian Partners > Voluntary Sector > Partners (Voluntary Sector) (May 2, 2010).
- Worldwide NGO Directory. Search: Keywords: human rights; Country: Canada. www.wango.org (May 11, 2010.

rights; or, that it undertakes to apply a human rights approach to its pursuit of its core purposes.[2] This process identified 126 organizations to be contacted.

In the second step invitations to participate in the survey were directed to individual staff of the organizations. If the organization listed individual staff members on its website, invitations were sent to them directly. If it did not, then a request was sent to a representative of the organization, usually the executive director, explaining the purpose of the study and asking that the invitation to participate be forwarded to their staff. When the survey closed 225 individuals, including 40 self-identified as executive directors, had responded; 201 of these completed the survey.[3]

Given this method of soliciting responses, the data generated is subject to several limitations. First, as the sample is nonrandom, no strong inferences can be made from the sample to the population of all Ontario-based NGOs that advance human rights, let alone to other NGOs inside or outside of Ontario. Further, as responses were voluntary, there is likely to be a great deal of selection bias including, but not limited to, an overrepresentation of people who are inclined to complete surveys and of people who happened not to be overloaded with work when they received the invitation. Also, people who might have participated were excluded because gatekeepers refused to forward the request to participate. Second, the category of NGOs that advance human rights is internally diverse, both in the types of human rights they address (everything from AIDS to international development and from poverty to civil liberties) and in the geographical focus of their efforts (everything from their local community to Canada to the global south). On the one hand, this diversity can make it difficult to know what to make of aggregate answers to certain questions (e.g., how useful is it for a student to participate in a study exchange at a foreign university?). On the other hand, this diversity suggests that where strong patterns of responses emerge, they are less likely to be limited to any specific type of NGO.

While it is important to recognize these and other limitations, even if the results discussed below represent nothing more than the opinions of 200+ people, they *do* represent the opinions of 200+ people and that is useful for considering the types of questions that interest us here.

2. Skills and Competencies: Which Are Important? Where Are They Being Developed?

Of most direct relevance to this discussion, respondents were presented with a list of 27 skills or competencies and asked two questions about them: Please rate the importance of the ability to exercise the following skills or competencies to being successful in your present position; Which of [the following] experiences contributed SIGNIFICANTLY to your present ability to perform each of the skills and competencies? For the second question respondents were presented with a number of experiences, of which we will focus on two: Formal Education and Student Clubs & Volunteering. Approximately 186 respondents answered this series of questions. The percentages of respondents who rated each skill or competency as "Essential" is summarized in Table 1, Column 1; the percentage of respondents who said that Formal Education and Student Clubs &

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[2] So-operationalized, this definition excludes organizations that merely commit to respect or to not violate human rights in pursuing their purposes. It was further decided that university departments and research centres would not be included in the study. Nor world churches, although organizations created by churches to pursue more limited purposes might be.

[3] Educational background of the respondents.

Volunteering contributed significantly to their ability to exercise each skill or competency is summarized in Table 1 Column 2 and 3 respectively.

To focus the analysis on the most widely valued skills and competencies, I isolate the skills and competencies that 50% or more of the respondents said were essential to being successful in their position (Table 2, Column 1). This leaves us with twelve skills and competencies: Initiative/Ability to Work Independently; Ability to Work with a Team; Interpersonal Skills; Written Communication; Ability to Work with the Unknown; Project Management; Oral Communications & Public Speaking; Strategic Planning; Non-profit Values & Ethics; Leadership; Networking (Public—Private—Non-Profit); and Ability to Hold Effective Meetings. I think it is noteworthy that with perhaps three exceptions (project management, strategic planning, non-profit values), these are fairly generic skills and competencies that knowledge workers should demonstrate, regardless of the specific sector or profession in which they work. Given our interest in what the light this study might shed on higher education in general, we will limit our focus to these nine fairly generic skills and competencies, which, as it happens are some of the very kinds of skills that we in the university, and perhaps especially the social sciences and humanities, would like to think our graduates are developing in the process of earning their Bachelor degrees.

The value of these skills and competencies finds supports in other elements of the survey. For instance, with a few notable exceptions, those respondents who chose to discuss the relative value of general skills versus specific knowledge in their answers to on open-ended questions suggested that specific knowledge is a lot easier to learn on the job than general skills. The value of general skills finds further support in answers given to the question: "In a typical week, approximately what percentage (%) of your time does your position require you to spend performing each of the following functions?" Respondents were given the option to selection one of the following for each of eleven functions:[4] 0%, 1-5%, 6-10%, 11-25%, 25-50%, 75-100%. Even if we exclude the functions that respondents placed in the 1-5% category, we find said that, on average, the 202 respondents work in positions that require them to perform 5 of these functions in an average week. The median number of functions was 6 and only 43 respondents indicated their jobs required them to devote 6% or more of their week to only one or two tasks. If we included functions in the 1-5% category, the numbers would be even higher. Assuming that the respondents to this survey are representative of this (and maybe other similar) sectors, it appears that while organizations will always require some narrow specialists, they still require employees with generic skills and competencies that will enable them to be flexible and adaptable multi-taskers who can readily learn to perform a wide range of functions.

Things get more interesting when we ask, as the survey did, which experiences respondents believe contributed significantly to their present ability to perform each of these skills or competencies. On the one hand, we should (humbly?) observe that, with the exception of "Written Communication" and "Competency in French," the highest percentage of respondents selected "Self-Taught/On the Job" as having made a significant contribution to their ability to

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[4] Budgeting & Financial Management; Grant Writing & Follow-Up Reporting; Fundraising (Other Than Grants); Project Management; Managing Employees; Managing Volunteers/Students or Local Chapters; Networking/Liaising with Other NGOs; Public Relations, Public Speaking, Public Advocacy; Government Relations/Lobbying/Advocacy; Monitoring Human Rights Violations: Information Gathering, Research & Documentation; Providing Services to Clientele.

perform every skill or competency.[5] Make of that what you will. On the other hand, when we compare the rank-ordered responses to the question of whether each of "Formal Education" and "Student Clubs & Volunteering" contributed significantly to the respondents' present ability to each of the skills or competencies (Table 1, Column 2 & 3), more practically applicable results emerge. If we focus on those skills to which at least 50% of respondents said either their education or clubs and volunteering made a significant contribution (Table 2 Column 2 & 3), two important observations can be made. First, six out of the seven skills and competencies that emerge are among the nine generic skills and competencies that at least 50% of respondents rated as essential for performing their jobs. Second, the types of skills and competencies that a majority of respondents associated with formal education and student clubs and volunteering appear to differ in kind; we might call those associated with formal education "individual initiative & communication skills" (written communication, oral communication, initiative, and French) and those associated with clubs and volunteering "leadership & cooperation skills" (leadership, teamwork, and interpersonal skills). Assuming that this finding may be relevant beyond the 200+ respondents to this survey, I divide the remainder of my discussion and analysis into observations relevant to the contributions of formal education, and extracurricular activities.

3. Formal Education

Strengths

So far we've seen that when respondents were asked directly, over 50% of them said that their formal education contributed significantly to their abilities with respect to written communication, oral communication/public speaking, initiative/ability to work independently, and competency in French. In this section I elaborate on some evidence from the survey that suggests the value of the undergraduate education we provide our students. I do this by reflecting upon two sets of questions which I will call the "candidate strength and weakness" questions and the "desired degree" questions.

The "candidate strength and weakness questions" consisted of a triad of open-ended questions that were addressed to the 135 respondents who indicated that they had been involved as decision-makers in hiring entry-level employees.[6] Responses to these questions were organized into categories, the most numerous of which I discuss here and in section 4. On my reading, some of the responses provide vindication for many of the values of undergraduate education that professors often find themselves advocating (not always successfully) to students. An irony, of course, is that the very processes through which undergraduate education helps students develop skills and competencies that these NGO employers seem to value are often viewed by students as barriers to getting what they think they really want: a degree. Perhaps some of the

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[5] This is not included on the table. Also note that the percentages do not add up to 100 because respondents were permitted to check as many contributing influences as applied.

[6] The questions were: In your experience, what have been some of the key strengths in candidates' educational and other experience that have made you confident that they would be successful in your organization?; In your experience, what are some of the key weaknesses in candidates' educational and other experience that have made them a poor fit for your organization?; and, Are there any skill sets or knowledge bases that you think university graduates who apply for jobs with your organization should have that you have typically found that they don't? Please note: I carefully compared the responses to eliminate any double-counting of comments by the same respondent on different questions.

comments reported below might provide useful fodder the next time you're trying to explain to a disgruntled undergraduate why you expect them to write essays or to hand their work in on time.

Communication Skills: Forty-eight of the 135 respondents (36%) reiterated the importance of communication skills in their comments, even though these had been covered earlier in the study. They referred to communication skills in general (18), as well as writing (23) and oral/presentation skills (7) in particular. Some illustrative comments include these: "We always ask for samples of their work when hiring in order to assess writing skills and also professional presentation ability. They are often lacking the ability to well-design and professionally present their work."; "Having a degree does not mean good communication skills"; "Writing skills are often weaker than they should be."; "Writing!!!!! The ability to write at different levels, proper use of grammar and able to communicate ideas and be concise in doing so".

Maturity and Independence: To succeed in higher education, students have to come to terms with the facts that they will often be left on their own to get their work done and that they will often face strict, sometimes overlapping, deadlines. While these may strike students as unreasonable barriers to their success, comments by many respondents indicate that the skills students must develop to meet these challenges are valued in the workplace. The 41 comments labeled "maturity and independence" referred to initiative/ability to work independently (11); flexibility and adaptability (13); self-confidence and ability to deal with ambiguity (6); and planning, organization, and time management (11). Among the interesting comments in this regard were these: "Not being able to see what needs to be done without being told, not being able to complete tasks."; "Unable to motivate themselves and learn independently, unable to figure out problems on their own (use Google, instruction manuals)". Also of relevance, but offered in response to a different question, was this: "NGO staff have little time to spare so show that you will add to the solution not to the burden." I suspect this is true of many types of organization.

Critical Thinking and Analysis: This category represents a competency that was not included in the survey, but probably should have been given that 17 respondents mentioned one or both of these without prompting. These are skills that professors work hard to develop in undergraduates with varying degrees of success. This survey indicates that they are valued in the workplace.

Passion and Commitment: As faculty we often find ourselves advising students to follow their interests and passions in their course and program selections. Such advice is often met with incredulity. If this study is to be believed, we should take heart that this can be a requirement for getting a job, at least at some NGOs that advance human rights. References to terms like passion, commitment, and involvement appeared 17 times in responses to the "candidate strength and weakness questions"; they also appeared frequently in responses to other open-ended questions. The value of passion was captured by one respondent who wrote of job candidate weaknesses: "no clear focus of what skills they want to build, or experience they want to have (i.e.: the just WANT a job, any job)."

In addition to indicating they value the kinds of skills that undergraduate degrees promote, we and our students should take heart from the fact that in response to the "desired degree" questions employers in this sector indicate a willingness to hire students with Bachelor degrees. While employers in this sector do value students Masters degrees, they also indicate an openness to students without them. When asked about their most recent degree, 42% of respondents indicated that they possessed a M.A./M.Sc. (35%) or PhD (7%), but 46% indicated they had not needed such advanced degrees to secure employment: BA (33.5%), College Diploma (6%), Post-

Grad College Diploma (6.5%). Further, when asked to give advice to a student who wanted to obtain an entry-level position in an organization like the one they work for, only 16% of respondents said earning a MA was vital. As for a PhD, 11% advised that this would make it harder to get an entry-level job. Finally, when those who had experience hiring entry-level employees were asked about the desirability of various forms of education, the Bachelor Degree was selected most often as "highly desired" (46%), followed by the MA (31%). If the scope is broadened from "highly desired" to "highly desired" *and* "competitive," the preference-ordering differs only slightly: Masters Degree (88%), Bachelor Degree (87%), Post-Graduate College Diploma (65.2%), and College Diploma (43.7%).

Weaknesses

So much for the positives, plentiful as they are. The other side of the story is that most of the respondents indicate that their formal education did not contribute significantly to the development of seven of ten skills or competencies that a majority of them ranked as essential to success in their positions (ability to work with a team; interpersonal skills; ability to work with the unknown; strategic planning; leadership, networking; ability to hold effective meetings). If we want our graduates to be successful, we should consider how (and whether) we should attempt to address this. One answer that this study suggests, is to more actively encourage our students to participate in campus clubs and volunteering. I leave this to the next section. Here, I consider how we might address this through our curricula and pedagogy.

In terms of curricula, an obvious suggestion, but one that was not pursued in the study, is to add a course or courses to our programs that would be designed to teach students these cooperation and interpersonal skills. Such courses could, of course, be tailored to the requirements of each program. Some might say that a course of this nature only really belong in business, professional and semiprofessional programs, but, given that our the vast majority of our graduates are likely to find themselves working in organizations, I am inclined to disagree.

The survey did ask direct questions of relevance to pedagogy. These should be of general interest as they address what I called types (Table 3) and forms (Table 4) of assignments.[7] The results were generally consistent with the views respondents expressed about the importance of various skills and competencies to success in their position. Perhaps not surprisingly given the nature of their work, Table 3 indicates that the respondents saw more applied (grant application, policy paper, research proposal) and concise (précis, press release, newspaper article) types of writing assignments as most useful as preparation for working in their organization. Perhaps more surprising was how low they valued traditional research essays, critiques and literature reviews, given the emphasis that (at least some of) them placed on critical thinking, as well as creating videos and documentaries, given the high value they place on oral presentation skills to success in their positions. I'm not sure what broader lessons to draw from these views on types of assignments as they may reflect the narrow requirements of this sector. While the university's mandate to educate suggests that we should resist training undergraduate students to perform the narrow tasks of any particular career, a lesson we might consider drawing from this feedback is

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[7] The questions were: Based on your experience, please indicate the relative value of the following TYPES OF ASSIGNMENTS as preparation for someone planning to work in an organization like the one you work for; and Based on your experience, please indicate the relative value of the following FORMS OF ASSIGNMENTS as preparation for someone planning to work in an organization like the one you work for.

that it could be helpful to our students if we introduce more applied assignments that emphasis concision into the mix of assignments they will produce through the course of a degree.

More surprising, to me at least, were the responses to the question concerning forms of assignments (Table 4). While the differences in ranking should not be overemphasized, especially when the "Extremely Useful" and "Very Useful" responses are combined, it is striking that more respondents saw greater value in individual assignments as preparation for work in their organizations than in team assignments. This is especially so given that they ranked "Ability to Work with a Team" and "Interpersonal Skills" as a close second and third to "Initiative/Ability to Work Independently." Of course, it is unclear whether this reflects the actual value of team assignments, the quality of these respondents' experiences with such assignments, or a belief that these skills and competencies can be learned elsewhere. The fact that respondents rank service learning and internships highly is consistent with emphatic comments they make elsewhere on open-ended questions about the value of "real world" experience. This is clearly important and more and more universities, if somewhat less so students, are recognizing their value. Finally, the fact that individual *oral presentations* ranked first might give us pause, especially in a context where increasing class sizes make this form of assignment less and less practical given the demands it places on precious in-class time.

4. Extracurricular Activities

While placing more emphasis on leadership and interpersonal skills into the existing curricula and pedagogy of formal education is one way to help students develop a more complete set of generic skills, another way is to encourage them to gain the extracurricular experiences that respondents credit with having helped them develop these skills. As we have seen, over 50% of respondents said student clubs and volunteering contributed significantly to their present abilities to exercise "Leadership," the "Ability to Work with a Team," and "Interpersonal Skills." If we go a little further down the ranking, we find that while less than 50% said this of "Ability to Hold Effective Meetings" and "Networking," the percentages for student clubs and volunteering were far higher than for formal education (44.3% vs. 15.6% and 37.8% vs. 16.5%, respectively). Thus there appears to be much of value to be gained for students from engaging in such extracurricular activities.

One might reasonably ask, however, if, given the obvious potential for such involvement to impede students' academic success, wouldn't it be better to encourage them to develop these skills and competencies through the formal curriculum. Here again I find responses to the open-ended "candidate strength and weakness questions" persuasive. Eighty-eight of the 135 respondents (65%) made comments that I grouped under the heading "the value of gaining practical experience"; this was the most common type of comment by far. This category included endorsements of the importance of volunteer or work experience with NGOs, of life experience in general, and of experience living and working in international settings. While the relevance of some of these comments is limited to human rights and international development NGO sector, the general point that organizations value job candidates who have had experiences relevant to the organization's line of work seems of broad applicability. This broader concern is illustrated in comments like these: "lack of understanding of the NGO/not for profit culture"; "unused to office environment,…deadlines, unrealistic expectations"; "Not knowing how to apply their education to the real world, having theory and limited practice"; "No experience other than formal education"; "We tend to get very qualified applicants. Some just don't have much

experience outside of a more structured academic setting, and only experience will remedy that." Whichever field they hope to pursue, undergraduates will benefit from experiences that help them make these connections while simultaneously developing, it should not be forgotten, valuable teamwork and interpersonal skills (which, at 41, were mentioned almost as many times as communication skills). Thus, even if we place greater emphasis on the development of cooperative and interpersonal skills in our curricula and pedagogy, there are still good reasons to encourage students to seek opportunities to engage in relevant extracurricular activities.

The unique contribution of extracurricular activities also finds support in responses to an open-ended question that asked all respondents what advice they would give students preparing for careers in their organizations. Six of the respondents emphasized networking, even though it had yet to be mentioned in the survey. Some of their comments appear relevant beyond this NGO sector: "Do as much networking as you can in whatever shape that may take- volunteering, attending conferences/workshops, internships, work, etc. That is often how you hear of job or internship opportunities and how you can make your application stand out from the hundreds of others."; "Networking is key to really make yourself stand out from everyone else because when you graduate you'll be competing against your peers, but also all the other students from similar programs in other universities/colleges as well as past graduates and those already in the field, so the more you can make yourself stand out from the rest, the better. This is why networking is particularly helpful because people learn to know your name and face and will likely remember if they come across your application for a job opportunity." Finally, the importance of networking, and hence extracurricular involvement, is emphasized by the fact that respondents indicated that their organizations tend to advertise positions in ways that privilege those who are in the loop; while only 18.1% said they advertise in newspapers, 86.6% said they advertise on their own web site and 85.9% said they advertise through word of mouth/contacts/networks.

The implications of respondents' answers to questions concerning their own involvement in student organizations (campus-based clubs, associations, chapters of nonprofits/NGOs, student government, etc.) for whether students should be advised to engage in extracurricular activities are mixed. On the one hand, a clear majority (63%) indicated that they had belonged to such organizations and many of these indicated that they had been quite active (78% said they had belonged to two or more organizations and 66% said they had served as an executive member (President, Treasurer, Secretary, etc.) of one or more student associations). On the other hand, this means that 37% hadn't belonged to student organizations and were still able to get jobs in this sector. [8] The implications were similarly mixed for responses to a number of questions designed to get a sense of the relevance of experience in student organizations to securing employment. When those who had belonged to student organizations were asked if they felt it had helped them obtain their first job after they graduated, 6% indicated they had been hired by an organization they had belonged to as a student and 44% indicated that they believed their experience impressed the organization that hired them, but 50% said they didn't think their experience helped them secure a job. When asked to give advice to a student who wanted to obtain an entry-level position in an organization like the one they work for, 45.7% of respondents described gaining experience with any NGO as vital to obtaining a good job, but

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[8] Unfortunately, the question only asked about university or college student organizations and not volunteering in general, so there is no way of telling how many of this 37% participated in similar extracurricular activities that did not involve student groups.

another 45.7% described it only as 'helpful'. Respondents placed slightly less emphasis on gaining work (coop, internship) or volunteer experience with particular NGO a student wished to work for; this was rated as vital by 35% and 33.5% respectively.

While these findings do not decisively support the claim that we would do well to encourage our students to engage in extracurricular activities as part of a broader understanding of their undergraduate education, the fact that for many of them it could be beneficial for securing and succeeding in a career, at least in the human rights NGO sector, and likely beyond.

Conclusion and Further Research

There seem to be two main take-away points from the analysis of the study being discussed here. On the one hand, at least among some who work for Ontario-based NGOs that advance human rights, there seems to be a sense that their formal education contributed to the development of skills and competencies that they consider essential to their ability to succeed in their jobs and that are valued when they evaluate job candidates (written communication, oral communication/public speaking; initiative/ability to work independently). On the other hand, the study also indicates that these respondents believe that their formal education did not help them develop all such skills (ability to work with a team; interpersonal skills; ability to work with the unknown; leadership; networking; ability to hold effective meetings). The respondents indicated that they believed that student clubs and volunteering had helped them develop many of these skills that their formal education had not (especially leadership; ability to work with a team; interpersonal skills; and to a lesser degree, ability to hold effective meetings and networking).

Implications of the survey were also considered for thinking about whether we should seek to help students supplement the skills that they appear not be developing through their formal education by adding courses to our program curricula and adding assignments that emphasize practicality and concision to our assessment strategies. While this is likely worth pursuing, the discussion suggested that there are additional reasons for counseling students to become involved in student clubs and volunteering in addition to what might be gained from additional courses and new assignments. Chief among these were 'real world experience' and networking opportunities. Thus, based on the limited evidence provided by this study, I cautiously conclude by recommending that we consider proceeding intentionally to add such courses and assignments to our programs and to encourage students to become involved in extracurricular activities as part of their overall undergraduate education.

This said, I will finish with a final note about a limitation of this research. Given the obvious similarities between participation in student clubs and volunteering and work in NGOs, the fact that respondents saw their earlier participation as helping them develop skills and competencies that were relevant to their later work should not be surprising. Further research in government and/or the for profit sector would be useful to see if the relationship between skills developed through student clubs and volunteering and relevance of these skills to the workplace is more generalizable.

APPENDIX

TABLE 1

1. % Reporting the Skill or Competency is ESSENTIAL to being successful in their position	2. % Reporting that their FORMAL EDUCATION contributed SIGNIFICANLTY to their present ability to perform this skill or competency	3. % Reporting that their experience in STUDENT CLUBS OR VOLUNTEERING contributed SIGNIFICANLTY to their present ability to perform this skill or competency
Initiative/Ability to Work Independently (90.7%)	Written Communication (87%)	Leadership (60%)
Ability to Work with a Team (89.3%)	Oral Communication & Public Speaking (58.9%)	Ability to Work with a Team (58.9%)
Interpersonal Skills (88.1%)	Initiative/Ability to Work Independently 56.8%)	Interpersonal Skills (56%)
Written Communication (82.2%)	Competency in French (56.5%)	Oral Communication & Public Speaking (47%)
Ability to Work with the Unknown (73.3%)	Project Management (40.4%)	Ability to Hold Effective Meetings (44.3%)
Project Management (66.8%)	Understanding the Government Context 37.1%)	Negotiation skills (42.8%)
Oral Communication & Public Speaking (66.7%)	Ability to Work with a Team (36%)	Initiative/Ability to Work Independently (39.1%)
Strategic Planning (66.3%)	Leadership (34.2%)	Volunteer Management (38.5%)
Non-profit Values & Ethics (64.7%)	Strategic Planning (33.8%)	Networking (Public—Private—Non-Profit) (37.8%)
Leadership (63.7%)	Program Evaluation (33.5%)	Conflict Resolution (37.4%)
Networking (Public—Private—Non-Profit) (54%)	Conflict Resolution (30.3%)	Non-profit Values & Ethics (35%)
Ability to Hold Effective Meetings (52.1%)	Ability to Work with the Unknown (29.2%)	Public Relations (34.6%)
Negotiation skills (49.7%)	Non-profit Values & Ethics (28.4%)	Ability to Work with the Unknown (31.8%)
Public Relations (47.2%)	Negotiation skills (27.8%)	Fundraising (Other than Grants) (28.6%)
Conflict Resolution (45.6%)	Grant Writing (27.4%)	Ability to Manage Human Resources (25.9%)
Program Evaluation (41.8%)	Understanding Non-profit Law/Legal Issues (26%)	Project Management 22.3%)
Understanding the Government Context (41.8%)	Interpersonal Skills (25.7%)	Strategic Planning (21.5%)
Ability to Manage Human Resources (35.8%)	Accounting, Budgeting, Financial Management (22.4%)	Competitive Spirit (19.8%)
Grant Writing (34.9%)	Public Relations (20.9%)	Written Communication (19%)
Accounting, Budgeting, Financial Management (30.8%)	Competitive Spirit (20.3%)	Entrepreneurship (18.6%)
Client/Case Management (29.8%)	Ability to Manage Human Resources (19.6%)	Understanding the Government Context (14.5%)
Volunteer Management (28.6%)	Client/Case Management (18.1%)	Client/Case Management (13.7%)
Fundraising (Other than Grants) (25.3%)	Networking (Public—Private—Non-Profit) (16.5%)	Accounting, Budgeting, Financial Management (11.5%)
Understanding Non-profit Law/Legal Issues (22.2%)	Ability to Hold Effective Meetings (15.6%)	Program Evaluation (9.9%)
Entrepreneurship (20.3%)	Entrepreneurship (12.8%)	Grant Writing (8.4%)
Competency in French (13.1%)	Fundraising (Other than Grants) (10.3%)	Understanding Non-profit Law/Legal Issues (7.2%)
Competitive Spirit (11.2%)	Volunteer Management (8.2%)	Competency in French 2.8%)

TABLE 2

1. % Reporting the Skill or Competency is ESSENTIAL to being successful in their position	2. % Reporting that their FORMAL EDUCATION contributed SIGNIFICANLTY to their present ability to perform this skill or competency	3. % Reporting that their experience in STUDENT CLUBS OR VOLUNTEERING contributed SIGNIFICANLTY to their present ability to perform this skill or competency
Initiative/Ability to Work Independently (90.7%)	Written Communication (87%)	Leadership (60%)
Ability to Work with a Team (89.3%)	Oral Communication & Public Speaking (58.9%)	Ability to Work with a Team (58.9%)
Interpersonal Skills (88.1%)	Initiative/Ability to Work Independently (56.8%)	Interpersonal Skills (56%)
Written Communication (82.2%)	Competency in French (56.5%)	
Ability to Work with the Unknown (73.3%)		
Project Management (66.8%)		
Oral Communication & Public Speaking (66.7%)		
Strategic Planning (66.3%)		
Non-profit Values & Ethics (64.7%)		
Leadership (63.7%)		
Networking (Public—Private—Non-Profit) (54%)		
Ability to Hold Effective Meetings (52.1%)		

TABLE 3

TYPE OF ASSIGNMENT	Extremely Useful	Very Useful	Combined
Writing a Grant Application	46.1%	36.8%	82.9%
Writing a Policy/Analysis Paper	49.0%	31.4%	80.4%
Writing a Precis (i.e., a concise summary of a longer document)	43.2%	34.9%	78.1%
Writing a Press Release	38.1%	35.1%	73.2%
Writing a Research Proposal	37.8%	28.0%	65.8%
Writing a Newspaper Article	24.6%	39.3%	63.9%
Writing a Traditional Research Essay	16.9%	27.5%	44.4%
Writing a Critique of a Book or Article	12.2%	28.2%	40.4%
Learning How to Read a Court Decision	17.5%	17.5%	35.0%
Creating a Video News Report	7.5%	27.4%	34.9%
Writing a Literature Review	14.2%	15.3%	29.5%
Creating a Short Documentary Film	4.2%	25.0%	29.2%
Writing a Book Review	6.3%	10.6%	16.9%

TABLE 4

FORM OF ASSIGNMENT	Extremely Useful	Very Useful	Combined
Individual Oral Presentation	57.9%	34.4%	92.3%
Individual Written Work	53.3%	35.9%	89.2%
Service Learning/Internship in a NGO	56.1%	32.1%	88.2%
Team Written Work	40.9%	40.4%	81.3%
Team Oral Presentation	37.6%	41.2%	78.8%
International Education/Volunteering/Internships	47.4%	29.2%	76.6%
Semiar Discussions	33.0%	43.3%	76.3%
Debates	26.9%	40.4%	67.3%