

Trends & Issues

A portrait of students considering the nonprofit sector



Key findings based on the *From Learning to Work™* survey for the nonprofit sector

During 2008 – 2009, the HR Council undertook research to improve the nonprofit sector’s understanding of the characteristics and motivating factors of prospective “early career” employees. The project, *Tapping into the Talents of Early Career Employees*, included a [literature review](#) and online focus groups with university students. The HR Council also subscribed to a national survey of Canadian students, *From Learning to Work™*, conducted by DECODE and Brainstorm Consulting.

In 2009, this annual survey had a total sample of 16,688 students from 50 post-secondary institutions across Canada. The majority – 84% – were university students, most pursuing an undergraduate degree.

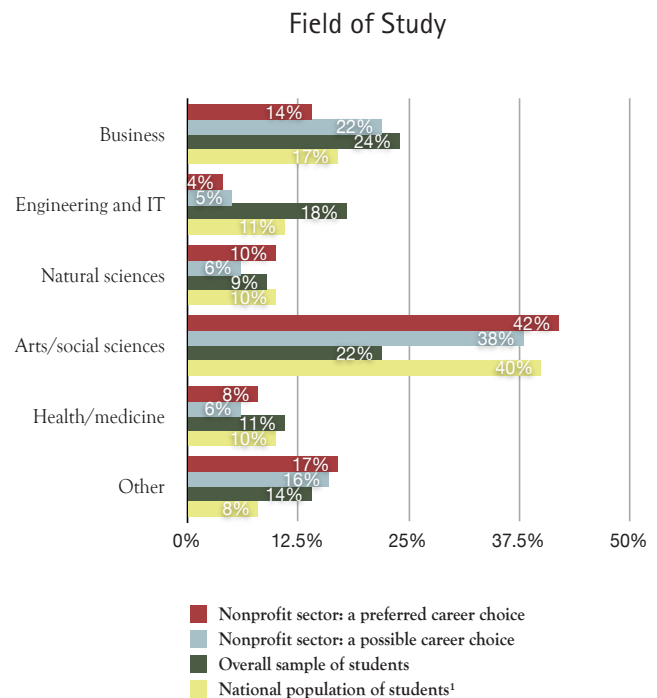
A total of 1,732 students surveyed (10%) indicated an interest in a nonprofit career in response to a question that allowed multiple responses; in this summary report, this group of students is identified as *Nonprofit sector: a possible career choice*. When asked which (one) type of organization they would prefer to work for following graduation, 988 students (5.9% of the total sample) chose *nonprofit/charity/social enterprise*; this group of students is identified as *Nonprofit sector: a preferred career choice*. This summary report compares responses of these two groups of students with the total sample, identified as the *Overall sample of students*.

Certain fields of study were under-represented in the total sample – liberal arts, fine arts, education, social sciences and law – and it appears that this under-sampling reduced the number of students in

the survey who indicated an interest in the nonprofit sector (see Figure 1).

Not all 1,732 students who indicated an interest in a nonprofit career have a strong interest in employment in the sector. Most of these students are also considering other career possibilities; 59% are considering *government/public service* (see Figure 2).

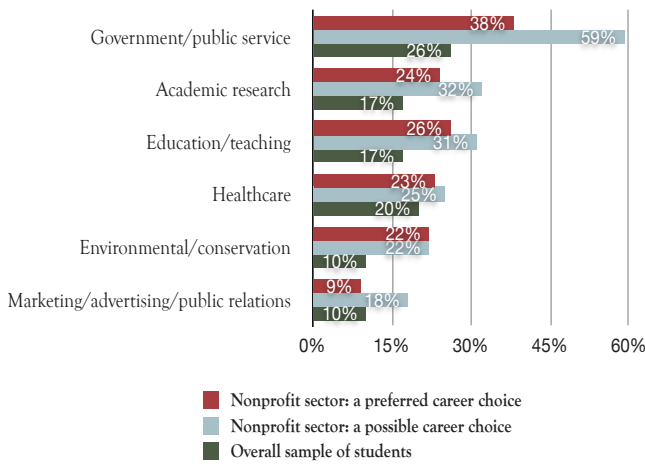
Figure 1



¹ Source: Statistics Canada 2006/2007 year data

Figure 2

In which industries would you ideally like to work when choosing your first employment after graduation?



When asked to choose which (one) type of organization they would prefer to work for following graduation, 29% selected government/public service; only 31% chose “non-profit/charity/social enterprise.” Among students who would prefer to work in the nonprofit sector, 38% are also considering the government/public service (see Figure 3).

Significantly more young women are considering nonprofit careers than young men; the gender imbalance in the *possible career* sub-sample (23% male; 77% female) mirrors the current gender imbalance in the nonprofit labour force. However, the diversity profile of students considering a nonprofit career is the same as the overall survey sample; 17% identified themselves as *visible minority*.

Students interested in nonprofit careers are somewhat more likely than other students to choose studies that align with their interests and abilities, and significantly more likely to choose studies that lead to a career that allows them to make a *positive impact*. Half chose their area of study because it provides them with a range of transferable skills and one third chose studies that were conducive to working in other countries. They were significantly less likely to choose studies that lead to

a *stable career*, a career that *pays well* or one that has *good income prospects* (see Figure 3).

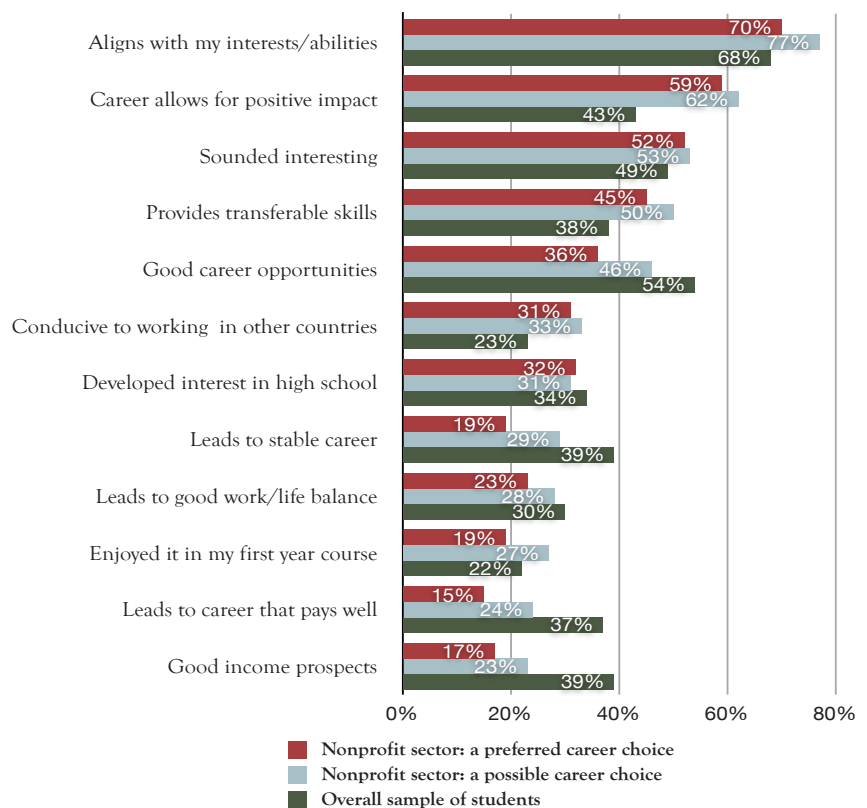
In choosing career goals, students interested in nonprofit careers were significantly more likely to identify *dedication to a cause/serving a greater good*. Job security is less important but still scores high. Work-life balance, especially flexible working hours, is the highest priority for all students. (see Figure 4)

Students rated personal relationships as most influential in their career choice process. Acquaintances already working for the organization, professors and parents were considered more influential than career centre advisors or co-op advisors.

Most students considering a nonprofit career don’t have a well-defined career plan and are not confident that their first job after graduation will be one they really want. They are willing to accept a job that is not ideal, but may be a good starting point for their careers. They are also willing to change jobs frequently in order to find work that fits their

Figure 3

Why did you choose your area of study?



interests and abilities.

Students interested in nonprofit careers learn about employers primarily from career/job websites, employer websites, and through friends and family. When researching employers, students are most interested in learning about current job offerings, job descriptions and requirements, and salary and compensation. The information most students are seeking on employers' websites includes job postings, in-depth details about jobs, details about the hiring process (including opportunities to contact someone) and details about salaries offered. Almost 80% of students would like salary information included in job postings.

Students considering nonprofit careers appreciate the presence of employers on campus, with approximately half indicating an interest in receptions, information sessions, speakers and career fairs.

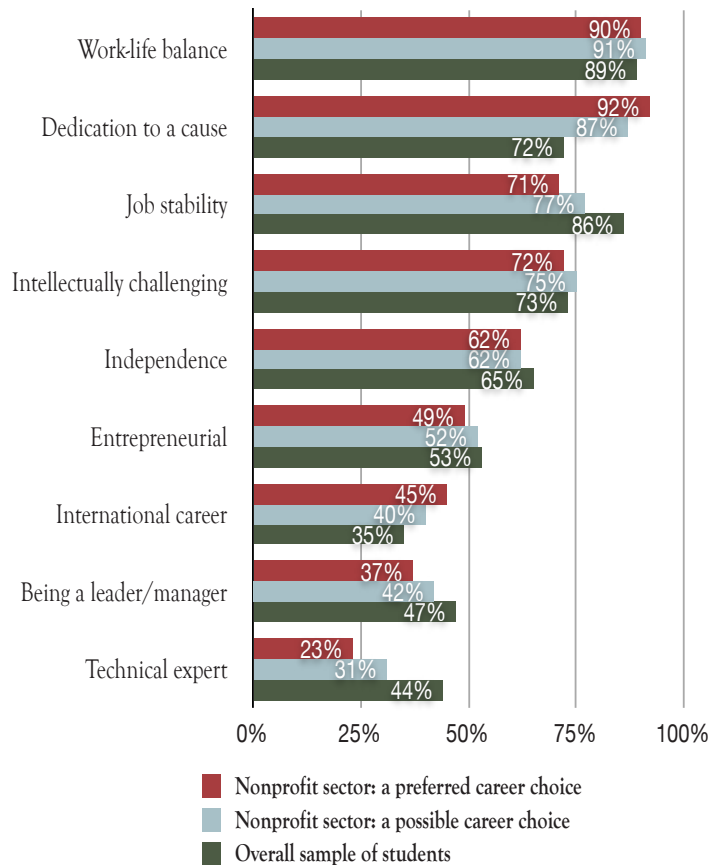
Of students who indicated a "possible" interest in the nonprofit sector, 40% had participated in a co-op or internship. As part of co-ops and internships, students are most interested in job orientation and training, challenging assignments, receiving a good employer reference and a performance assessment, and having an opportunity for future full-time employment.

In choosing full-time employment following graduation, all students consider *interesting work* and *work-life balance* to be the most important factors. Students considering nonprofit careers are significantly more likely than other students to seek *opportunities to have a personal impact* and work that involves a *commitment to social responsibility*. They are less concerned than other students about job



Figure 4

Below is a list of nine possible career goals. Which are most important to you? (top two)



security, opportunities for advancement, and good initial salary level (see Figure 5a & b). However, their anticipated level of debt following graduation is about the same as other students: the majority will owe slightly over \$25,000.

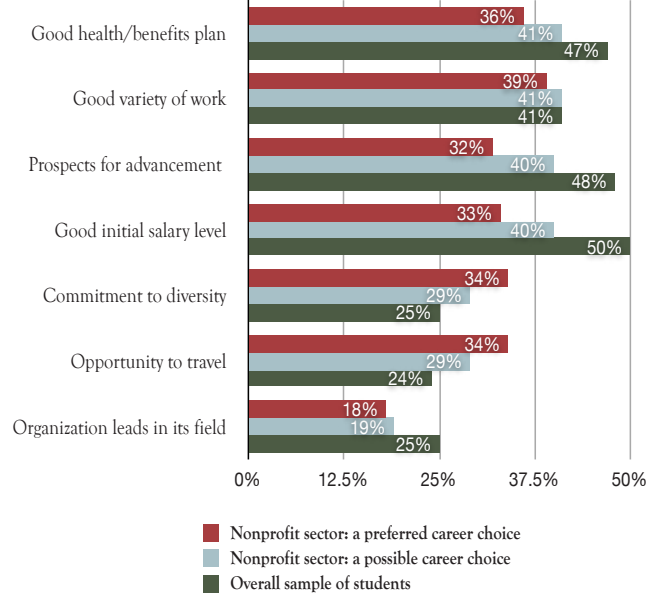
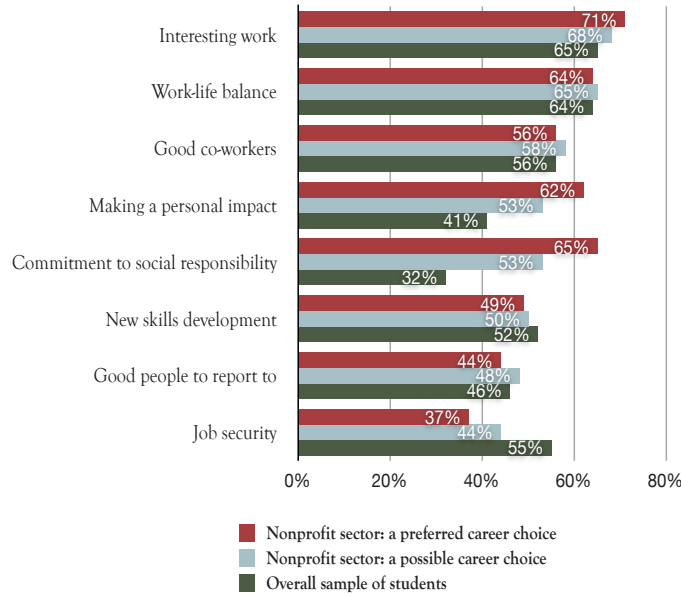
Students considering nonprofit careers reported significantly lower expectations for their starting salary and salary after five years than other students. Students in the "preferred choice" group expected a starting salary of \$40,000 and a salary of \$59,500 after five years. As well, 61% of all students expect a promotion within the first 18 months in a job.

The *From Learning to Work™* survey also provides information about employer brands. In the overall sample of 16,688 students, five well-known nonprofit organizations (excluding hospitals) were ranked among the top 25 employers.

Figure 5a

Figure 5b

When considering full-time employment with an organization immediately following graduation, please rate the importance of the following in your decision-making ("very influential"):



Students who indicated an interest in a nonprofit career ranked five well-known nonprofits (excluding hospitals) in the top 10 employers. However, they also ranked the federal, provincial and municipal governments in the top 10 employers.

Students' field of study had a significant impact on their potential interest in nonprofit careers. Students in business, engineering and information technology did not rank any nonprofit organizations among the top 25 employers they selected. Liberal arts students ranked six nonprofits in their top 20 list of employers, while students studying natural sciences ranked four nonprofits in their selection of top 20 employers, showing a preference for organizations focused on health and environmental issues.

For an overall report on the *Tapping into the Talents of Early Career Employees* project findings, including the literature review and focus groups, visit hrcouncil.ca.

HR Council_{for the} Voluntary & Non-profit Sector

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