Job Hunting and Work-Integrated Learning

October 7th, 2025
Prepared for UASU Executive Committee
by Department of Research and Advocacy

Overview

This survey ran on the UASU Perks student engagement platform September 12th to 22nd and reached 1,315 respondents, approximately 49% of the unique Perks users active in that window. The margin of error for a comparable probability-based random sample of the same size would be three percent, 19 times out of 20. The survey ran under the generic title 'What's your biggest frustration with…' to counter self-selection bias about the topic.

Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey found that returning student unemployment in Alberta reached a record high in July 2025 at [27.8%](). This Perks survey was designed to give a complimentary, granular picture of student employment this summer.
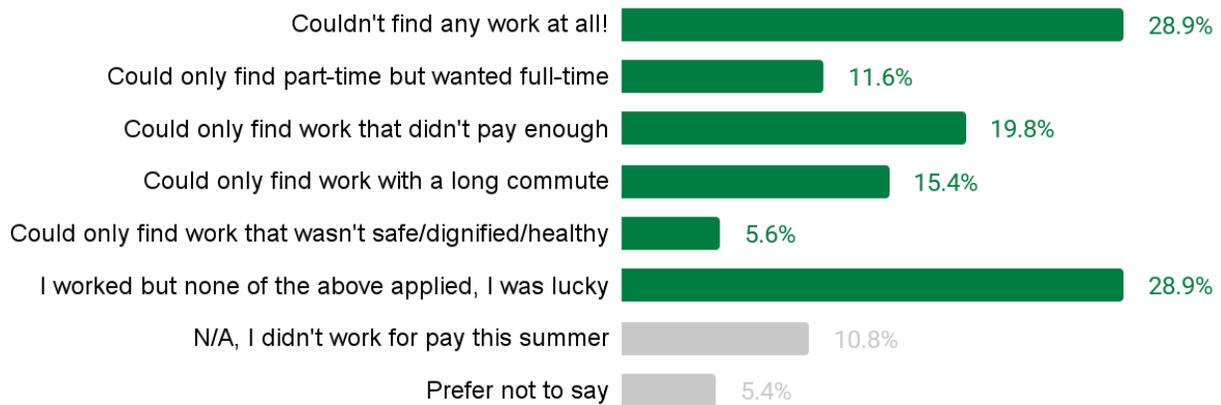
Key Findings

- Over the summer, 29% of respondents tried to find work and could not, often filing dozens of job applications. Unsuccessful job searches in the summer were a predictor of unsuccessful job searches (both for jobs in general and for work-integrated learning opportunities) in the fall.

- Over the summer, only 29% of respondents found full-time, safe, dignified, well-paying work without a long commute. These respondents were unique in that they typically filed 0–5 job applications.

- More than one out of five respondents, especially first- and second-year students, wanted to work during Fall Term but had not found work as of the third week of September.

- Only one in twenty respondents had a work-integrated learning experience lined up other than program requirements. Many more wanted to find WIL experiences.

- Respondents' biggest frustrations with job hunting commonly focused on receiving no response to applications (62 out of 250 text responses) and experience requirements for entry-level roles (49 responses). 18 responses highlighted frustrations with applicant tracking systems and the perception that online applications go nowhere. 17 responses expressed frustration that patronage and connections, rather than effort or merit, control opportunities.

"Which of the following have you run into this summer?" (Choose all that apply.)

Almost one-third of respondents (29%) tried to find work but could not, consistent with the Labour Force Survey. One in four could only find work that didn't pay enough. Long commutes and lack of full-time opportunities were also frequent issues, and one out of every eighteen respondents could only find work that wasn't safe, dignified, or healthy.

All of these rates remained closely consistent (<0.5% variance) after weighting by year of study.
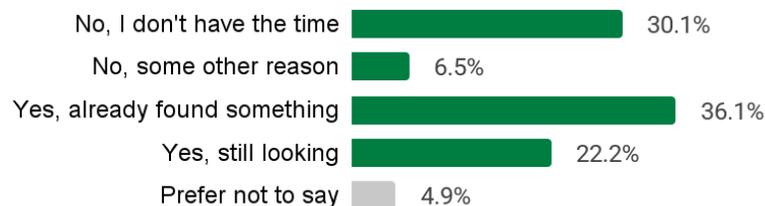
Work experiences during Summer 2025

Couldn't find any work at all!	28.9%
Could only find part-time but wanted full-time	11.6%
Could only find work that didn't pay enough	19.8%
Could only find work with a long commute	15.4%
Could only find work that wasn't safe/dignified/healthy	5.6%
I worked but none of the above applied, I was lucky	28.9%
N/A, I didn't work for pay this summer	10.8%
Prefer not to say	5.4%

"Are you planning to work this semester?"

Over one in five respondents wanted to work during Fall Term but had not found work as of the third week of September. This result shifted downwards around 1% when weighted because it varied widely by year of study: 27-28% for first- and second-year students, 13% for third-year, and 17% for fourth-year or above.

Work plans for Fall 2025

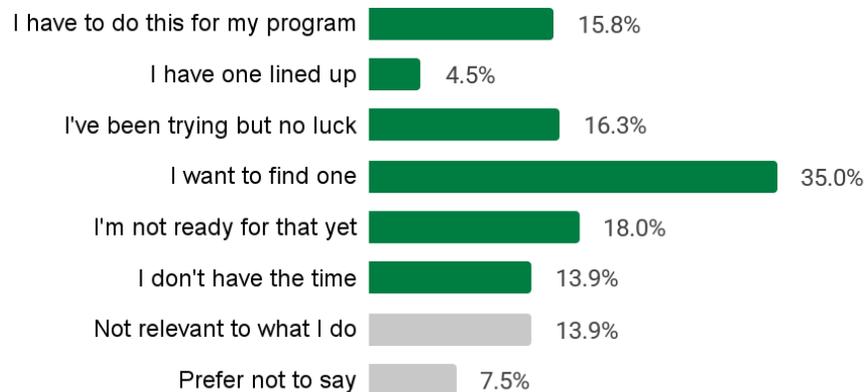|	
No, I don't have the time	30.1%
No, some other reason	6.5%
Yes, already found something	36.1%
Yes, still looking	22.2%
Prefer not to say	4.9%

Unsuccessful job searches in the summer were a predictor of unsuccessful job searches in the fall. Phi correlation coefficients were used to find the closest positive and negative associations with 'yes, still looking' (wanting work in Fall Term but not being able to find it). By far the strongest positive correlation (0.24) came from 'Couldn't find any work at all!' (Of the 292 respondents who were still looking in the fall, 144 (49%) had also been unemployed but looking in the summer.) By far the strongest negative correlation (-0.17) came from 'I worked but none of the above applied, I was lucky.'

"What about work-integrated learning? Internships, co-ops, field experience, clinicals. How's that looking this year?"

Only one in twenty respondents had a work-integrated learning experience lined up other than program requirements. Many more wanted to find WIL experiences.

As this was a 'choose all that apply' question, associations between options are possible. For example, of the 208 respondents who need to do WIL for their program, 20 (10%) *also* selected 'I've been trying but no luck', rising to 19% when including 'I want to find one' and excluding 'I'm not ready for that yet.' In other words, at least one-tenth of respondents who need WIL placements to graduate had been struggling to find those placements as of the third week of September.

Work-integrated learning for 2025/26

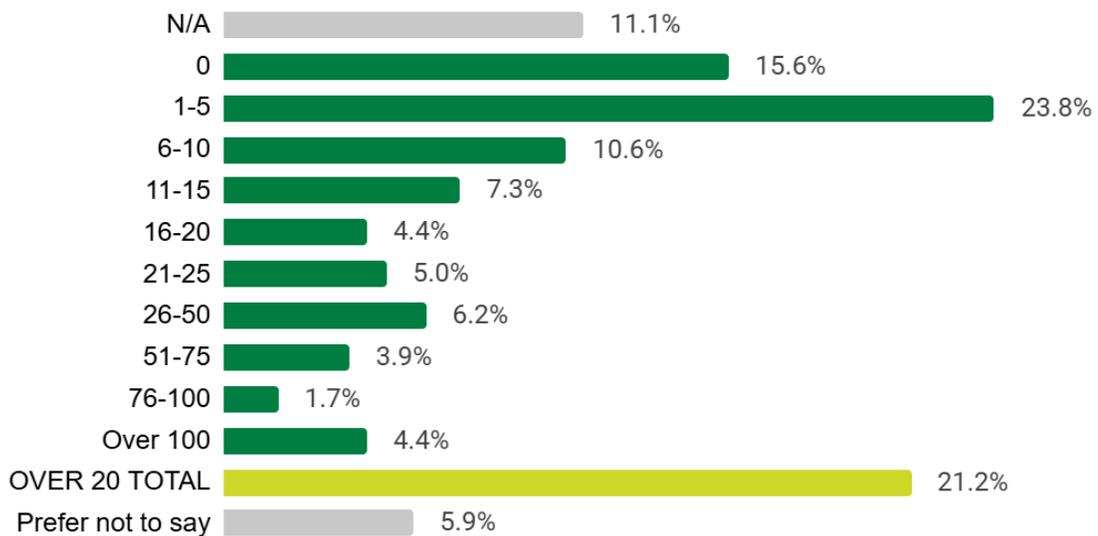|	
I have to do this for my program	15.8%
I have one lined up	4.5%
I've been trying but no luck	16.3%
I want to find one	35.0%
I'm not ready for that yet	18.0%
I don't have the time	13.9%
Not relevant to what I do	13.9%
Prefer not to say	7.5%

'I've been trying but no luck' also had modest positive correlations (phi coefficients of 0.12-0.15) with unsuccessful job hunts for summer and fall. Of the 215 respondents who had been unsuccessfully hunting for WIL opportunities, 90 (42%) had also had an unsuccessful hunt in summer. This correlation suggests that difficulty finding WIL placements has common factors, and that youth unemployment writ large may have serious impacts on students' ability to develop career skills and even meet program requirements.

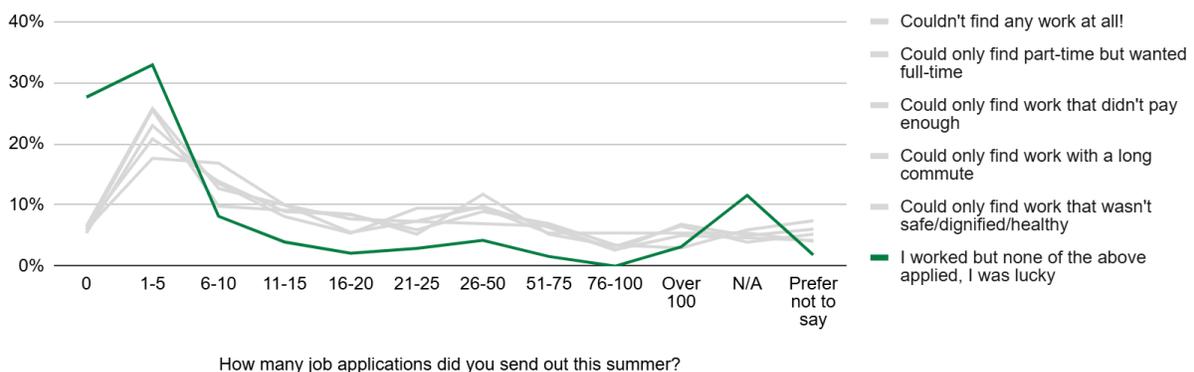## "How many job applications did you send out this summer?"

One in five respondents had sent out over 20 applications. This result did not change when weighted by year of study.

Job applications in Summer 2025

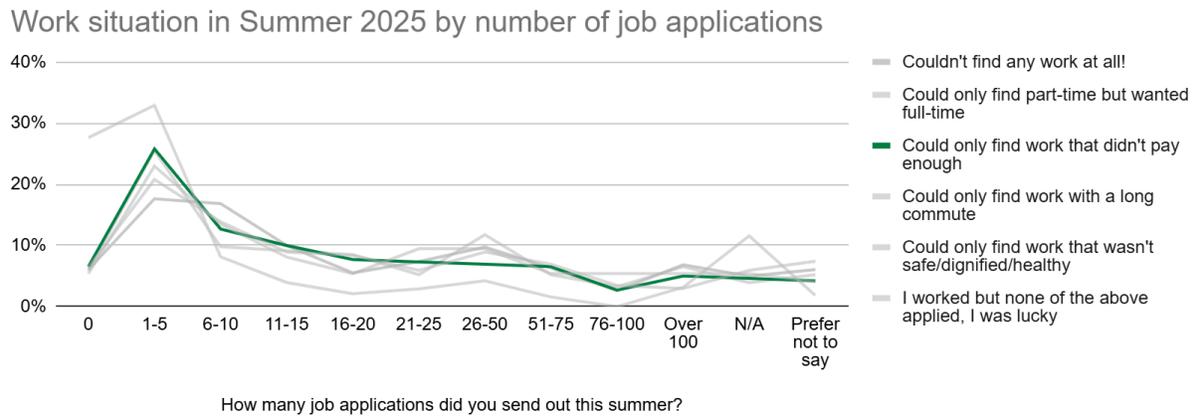| Category	Percentage
N/A	11.1%
0	15.6%
1-5	23.8%
6-10	10.6%
11-15	7.3%
16-20	4.4%
21-25	5.0%
26-50	6.2%
51-75	3.9%
76-100	1.7%
Over 100	4.4%
OVER 20 TOTAL	21.2%
Prefer not to say	5.9%

This question looked profoundly different when filtered by students' work situation in summer 2025. The 29% of respondents who found the best jobs (safe, dignified, well-paid, full-time work) overwhelmingly filed five or fewer applications. While a few students did file dozens of applications to get that work (one out of nine applied for over 20 jobs), there was a very strong connection between submitting *few* applications and finding the best jobs. There was even a clear separation between the job hunting experience of the 30% who found the best jobs (whether from returning to hometowns, previous connections, qualifications, or better job-hunting abilities) and everyone else.

Work situation in Summer 2025 by number of job applications

Legend:
- Couldn't find any work at all!
- Could only find part-time but wanted full-time
- Could only find work that didn't pay enough
- Could only find work with a long commute
- Could only find work that wasn't safe/dignified/healthy
- I worked but none of the above applied, I was lucky

How many job applications did you send out this summer?

Compare to the 20% of respondents who could only find work that didn't pay enough, of whom 28% applied for over 20 jobs:

Work situation in Summer 2025 by number of job applications

How many job applications did you send out this summer?

Legend:
- Couldn't find any work at all!
- Could only find part-time but wanted full-time
- **Could only find work that didn't pay enough**
- Could only find work with a long commute
- Could only find work that wasn't safe/dignified/healthy
- I worked but none of the above applied, I was lucky

Compare also to the 29% of respondents who could not find any work at all, of whom one-third applied for over 20 jobs:

Work situation in Summer 2025 by number of job applications

How many job applications did you send out this summer?

Legend:
- **Couldn't find any work at all!**
- Could only find part-time but wanted full-time
- Could only find work that didn't pay enough
- Could only find work with a long commute
- Could only find work that wasn't safe/dignified/healthy
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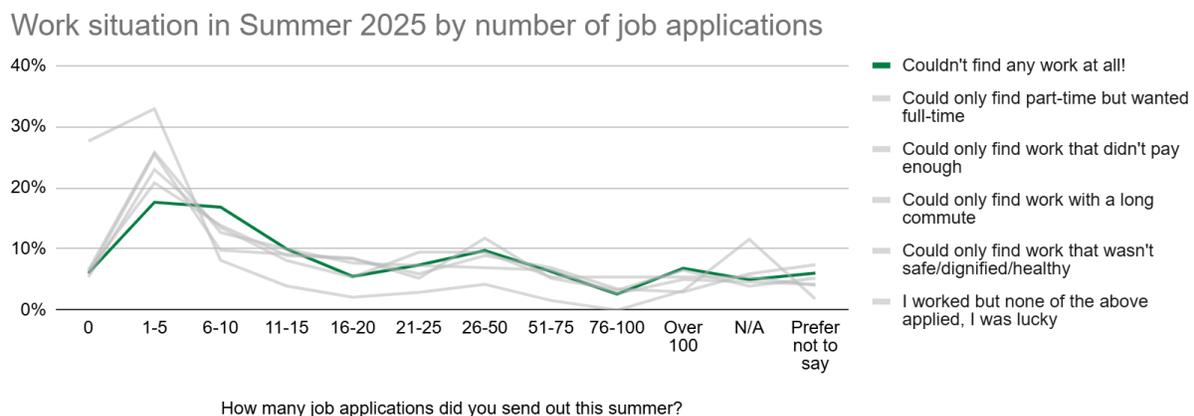
"What's your biggest frustration with job hunting? What would help the most?"

The most common text responses focused on receiving no response from employers. 62 out of 250 responses (25%) focused on this issue. For example:

- "In the past what has frustrated me the most is never hearing back from the places I applied to. Even a "you were not selected" email helps instead of always waiting and wondering. A lot of my friends have been looking for jobs for weeks or months and still haven't [heard] anything. Some have even graduated. I think it's extremely frustrating that you graduate with a university degree and it's still very hard to find a good adult job to begin your career."

- "...a lot of places don't even get back to me so I don't know why I didn't get the job or if I did something wrong."

- "Not getting a single response. It'd be nice if they would at least email me to tell me they're moving forward with someone else, but majority of job postings never send a follow-up email."

- "If they actually told you that they weren't interested."

- "Employers don't get back to you even if it's just a rejection they basically ghost you."

- "Non responsive businesses."

- "My biggest frustration is when I don't even get notified whether or not I've been rejected. A simple email of acknowledgment would help."

- "Being ghosted. A rejection would've been better."

- "Not hearing anything at all when I don't get a job, despite putting a ton of time into my application."

- "My biggest frustration? Hands down, it's getting ghosted. Like, at least tell me I didn't get in (and preferably why, but considering they don't even tell me I wasn't chosen at all, that might be too much to ask)."

- "No one answers."

Another very common theme, accounting for 49 out of 250 responses, was frustration with experience requirements for entry-level roles. For example:

- "There are no entry level positions. It seems no matter what experience I have working for family, volunteering or in education I am not "qualified" enough."

- "You need to be overqualified for a basic starting job."

- "A chance to gain experience as someone with no experience."

- "Entry level jobs requiring tons of experience despite its low pay."

- "Getting your first job is a nightmare, entry-level jobs ask for experience, if you haven't worked before you won't be able to find anywhere to start. Workplaces need to have open entry-level positions."

- "There are no entry level jobs anymore, everyone wants experience. Idk what would help at this point though."

- "The amount of hoops you have to jump through. Had to get an internship to get more internships, and I think without [Arts Work Experience] I would've been screwed."

18 responses highlighted frustrations with applicant tracking systems, the perception that online applications go nowhere. For example:

- "I think the most disrespectful thing that I've ever encountered is the lack of basic human respect in the whole process. Companies use AI's to filter for keywords as if I am a computer. There are no people reviewing applications and seeing potential or excitement within an employee."

- "I feel lost in large pools of candidates while also dealing with the emotional toll of rejection and the impersonal nature of automated systems like Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS)."

- "Resumes getting filtered out by AI algorithms."

- "I wish they'd stop using AI to look at our resumes and actually give us a chance."

- "The amount of work I put in for an AI to tell me I'm not qualified."

- "Opportunities to meet with employers one on one, instead of just submitting resumes online like most companies want you to do. I feel like that gives you a better shot than having your resume looked over by a robot."

17 responses about students' biggest frustrations focused on the perception that patronage and connections, rather than effort or merit, control opportunities. For example:

- "Or worse, they advertise the position open to all types of applicants and then only hire internally. I know so many people who have a job only because they know someone who was there already and able to vouch for / out a good word in."

- "You have to already know someone who works there for them to take interest in you."

- "There is an ethnicity bias and connection bias in hiring for part times."

- "The only reason I got my job was through years of searching, and ended up only getting the position because of connections. There is such a big demand for jobs, but nowhere is hiring."

- "The fact that getting hired practically requires some sort of connection to someone already working there, especially a high ranking individual."

- "Feeling like no matter how much work or volunteer experience I have, it doesn't matter because I don't have the connections that others have."

- "No use…applying. Hiring managers are taking only through referrals."

- "...most jobs that are open for me are gained through cronyism and nepotism…"

- "So many jobs nowadays are internal hiring, but still are presented as being public. This is really frustrating when you dump time into making a special resume just to be rejected. Being able to know which locations are actually looking for new workers would make a huge difference."

- "When I did job hunt (Jan-Feb), I sent out 50 applications and the only one I got a response from was through knowing someone."

Other common frustrations included a general lack of jobs, too many applicants for too few jobs, challenges with time/hours/student schedules, lack of career-relevant opportunities, and perceived bias away from hiring young people.