

**AN EXPLORATION OF THE SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITION FOR
UNIVERSITY GRADUATES IN NORTHERN ONTARIO: A QUALITATIVE CASE
STUDY**

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ABSTRACT

This research study examined the school-to-work transition for Algoma University graduates in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, using a qualitative case study approach. The research explored the experiences of university graduates from the past ten years as well as service providers who directly support the transition in order to better understand the school –to-work transition in a Northern Ontario context.

Understanding the school-to-work transition in a Northern Ontario context is significant as the region struggles with population decline, youth outmigration, an aging population, and large fluctuations in employment, all of which potentially contribute to challenges for university graduates as they transition to the labour market. The researcher conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with 27 participants and examined themes that emerged from the data. Five major themes emerged in the study: (a) preparation in curriculum; (b) work experience; (c) expectation clash; (d) networking; and, (e) soft skills. The findings demonstrate a) the importance of situating career preparedness within the curriculum; (b) the importance of work experience; (c) there are multiple factors that influence the expectations of recent graduates; and, (d) the importance of networking and networks in a Northern Ontario context.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

The link between the achievement of a post-secondary credential and the improvement of one's social and economic prospects is well accepted in most developed nations. In an effort to keep pace with globalization and enhanced economic competitiveness, industrialized nations such as Norway, France, Spain, the United States, and Canada have been steadily moving towards mass higher education (Barone & Ortiz, 2011; Trow, 2000). In 2012, 69.2% of Canadians aged 25 to 44 and 59.2% of those aged 45 to 64 had obtained some form of post-secondary credential (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2015). Increasingly, higher education is an expectation rather than an option for youth in Canada and abroad.

The impact of the attainment of a post-secondary credential on future earnings is well documented in the literature. Multiple analyses of Canadian data from the National Graduates Survey (NGS) demonstrate an association between higher-level credentials in technical fields and higher earnings (Finnie, 2004; Walter, 2006; Walters & Frank, 2010). It is not surprising that many parents and young people perceive university-level education as key to future economic success.

Despite rising attainment rates and a link between higher-level credentials and future earnings, there is an emerging narrative on the multiple challenges for youth

associated with the transition from university baccalaureate-level education to the labour market. Headlines such as “Universities are good at Imparting Knowledge, but though they have Career Counselling Centres, most fail when it comes to Teaching Students how to get a Job” are regularly found in mainstream media. Youth unemployment is a key concern in several countries, including South Africa, the United States, and Spain (Barone & Ortiz, 2011; Coetzee & Esterhuizen, 2010; Roksa & Arum, 2012). The youth unemployment rate in Canada is noteworthy, with 14.3% of youth between the ages of 15 to 24 being unemployed in 2012 (Bernard, 2013).

While youth unemployment is a major challenge associated with the school-to-work transition, another important consideration is underemployment. There is evidence that young people in multiple countries are struggling to make the transition to permanent, full-time employment. In the United States, a 2011 survey of 925 recent university graduates showed only half had full-time jobs after graduation (Roksa & Arum, 2012). Spain struggles with over-education, as notable numbers of university graduates are working in positions where their level of education is above 80% of those employed in similar occupations (Barone & Ortiz, 2011). Statistics Canada data (2016) shows the proportion of youth working in full-time permanent position has fallen significantly in the past four decades. The full-time employment rate for men aged 17 to 24, for instance, fell by between 9 to 24 percentage points in every province except Newfoundland and Labrador between the late 1970s to the mid-2010s (Statistics

Canada, 2016). Employment data, anecdotal evidence, and popular media suggest underemployment is an emerging issue for Canadian youth.

In Ontario, there is growing recognition that a highly skilled workforce is key to future economic prosperity. The Ontario government has a target of 70% of adults over the age of 25 having a postsecondary credential by 2020 (Ontario Ministry of Finance, 2016). In 2014, the province was well on its way to this goal with 66% of Ontarians over the age of 25 having a postsecondary credential (Ontario Ministry of Finance, 2016). In 2016, the Premier's Highly Skilled Workforce Expert Panel submitted its report "Building the Workforce of Tomorrow: A Shared Responsibility." The report explored the skills gap in Ontario, defined as "the difference between the skills that employers need, and the skills that are available in prospective employees", recognizing the gap is not all-encompassing but rather concentrated in particular sectors, regions, and occupations (The Premier's Highly Skilled Workforce Expert Panel, 2016). The report recognizes that unemployment rates in 2015 for youth, Indigenous peoples, and people with disabilities were much higher than the provincial average (The Premier's Highly Skilled Workforce Expert Panel, 2016). The link between postsecondary education and prosperity makes closing the skills gap for impacted sectors, regions, and occupations an important priority for Ontario's future social and economic prospects.

1.2 Purpose of Study

In Northern Ontario, the transition from school-to-work for university graduates has not been explored in the literature. Northern Ontario is a unique region within Ontario, consisting of 90% of the province's land mass while remaining home to only 786,500 people (Conteh & Segsworth, 2013). The region struggles with population decline, an aging population, youth outmigration, and large fluctuations in employment as a result of a historically-resource based economy (Cuddy, 2015; Moazzami, 2015). The region has many characteristics that differentiate it from the rest of Ontario, including its sparse and scattered population base and its growing Indigenous population (Conteh & Segsworth, 2013). The labour market is different from more populated regions in Ontario and by extension the school-to-work transition may be an entirely different experience.

Northern Ontario is one of the regions in which the skills-gap is concentrated. A 2015 study conducted by six workforce planning councils in Northern Ontario found that 57% of employers cited applicants not meeting qualification requirements (education level/credentials) as a reason why it is hard to recruit (Northern Ontario Workforce Planning, 2015). Furthermore, the same study reported 56% of employers citing applicants not meeting skill requirements as a reason why it is hard to recruit (Northern Ontario Workforce Planning, 2015). Northern Ontario is home to four universities (Lakehead University, Laurentian University, Algoma University, and Nipissing University), all of which were established in part to address concerns that youth were

leaving northern communities for their education and not returning (Conteh & Segsworth, 2013). There is strong rationale to consider the school-to-work transition for university graduates in Northern Ontario as a topic worthy of independent exploration.

Universities in Northern Ontario measure the success of graduates by using quantitative indicators that are standard throughout the university system in Ontario. These indicators include employment rates six months and two years after graduation, for instance, that are gathered from surveys such as the Ontario University Graduates Survey (OUGS) and the National Graduate Survey (NGS). Survey data can be used to analyze income levels, how closely work is related to a graduate's field of study, and whether a graduate is working full-time or part-time. While useful, the quantitative data does little to illuminate the actual, lived experience of university graduates seeking to enter the Northern Ontario labour market. In addition, quantitative data does not account for those who were successful in finding employment related to their studies but had to leave the region to do so. The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of university graduates who have entered or are attempting to enter the Northern Ontario labour market in order to better understand the school-to-work transition in a Northern Ontario context.

1.3 Researcher's Interest

My interest in this topic is grounded in my connections to Northern Ontario. I lived in Thunder Bay, Ontario, until the age of 17 at which time I relocated to Southern

Ontario to attend university. At that time in the mid-1990s, job opportunities in Northern Ontario were extremely limited and I was convinced there were no opportunities for me if I stayed in the region. I graduated from university with a degree in Wildlife Biology and remained in Southern Ontario for approximately ten years working in a number of jobs completely unrelated to my field of study. My transition from school-to-work was far from smooth, however, there were always opportunities and I was never unemployed.

In the mid 2000's, an opportunity presented itself to return to Northern Ontario to the community of Sault Ste. Marie. I noticed as I applied for positions in the north that the labour market was very different from Southern Ontario. I observed many positions were listed as internships and you had to meet eligibility criteria with respect to age, education, and home address in order to apply. I noticed there were no employment agencies to assist in getting a foot in the door. I noticed there were few private sector employers and many available positions were extremely specific in terms of qualifications and experience the organization was seeking. As my job search continued from a distance, I felt I was dealing with a labour market I did not fully understand.

I ended up working in post-secondary education once I relocated to the community. Since 2005, I have worked at Algoma University and it has been a tremendous personal and professional learning experience. It is through my work at

Algoma University that I have connected with students near the end of their studies, many of whom have a passion for Northern Ontario and a real desire to contribute to their communities upon graduation. My return to the north has fueled a renewed passion to see Northern Ontario prosper, and I am inspired by students who are looking forward to using their newly-developed skills, knowledge, and values to this end upon graduation. At the core of this research is a genuine desire to understand how university graduates experience the school-to-work transition in Northern Ontario and in figuring out which skills, knowledge, and values are most important to a positive transition. Most importantly, this research is fueled by a desire to help recent graduates find meaningful work in Northern Ontario and to help Algoma University build on its strengths to enrich supports for the school-to-work transition.

1.4 Research Questions

Three research questions guided the study:

1. How do Algoma University graduates seeking to enter the Sault Ste. Marie labour market experience the school-to-work transition?
2. How do university graduates and those supporting the school-to-work transition in Sault Ste. Marie understand the impact of the hidden features and nuances of Northern Ontario culture and labour market?
3. How has university education prepared graduates for the school-to-work transition? Which skills, knowledge, and values have been most valuable in

supporting the transition, and in what way? What student support services were most helpful in the school-to-work transition?

1.5 Significance of the Study

It is widely accepted in Canada that post-secondary education improves an individual's future social and economic prospects. There is evidence to suggest, however, that the relationship between the completion of post-secondary education and future employment success is not linear and depends on factors such as program of study and gender. Frank, Frenette, and Morissette (2015) analyzed Statistics Canada census data to show male graduates of engineering programs between the ages of 25 to 34 saw their earnings increase 10% in the period between 2005 to 2012. Meanwhile, men with bachelor's degrees in Social Science, Business Administration, and Mathematics had no wage increases (Frank, Frenette, & Morissette, 2015). Similarly, male graduates from programs in the Humanities saw their full-time employment rates rise from 74.7% to 75.2% between 2005 and 2010 while the same rates for female graduates in the Humanities rose from 56.5% to 67.6% over the same time period (Frank, Frenette, & Morissette, 2015). The relationship between post-secondary education and employment success is dynamic and dependent on a variety of factors.

Education policy in Ontario is largely based on the assumptions of human capital theory. The basic tenant of human capital theory is that increased knowledge and skills obtained through education results in improved economic outcomes for individuals and

societies (Crocker, 2006). The assumptions of human capital theory are embedded in several recent provincial policy documents. The Premier's Highly Skilled Workforce Expert Panel (2016) identifies strategic investment in human capital as one of four priorities areas of action. The expert panel's report is based entirely on the premise that developing a pool of workers with enhanced skills and competencies will drive growth and the competitiveness for the Ontario economy (The Premier's Highly Skilled Workforce Expert Panel, 2016). A report by the Brookfield Institute (2017) describes the correlation between a university degree and higher wages as an example of how university education can prepare graduates for employment in the growing technology sector. These two examples illustrate how the assumptions of human capital theory underpin provincial policy directions and future planning in the public and private sector.

Human capital theory has not been universally accepted by all scholars and economists. One criticism of human capital theory is that it assumes a relatively stable and open labour market in which hiring decisions are always made on the basis of knowledge and skill levels (Walters, 2006). Human capital theory struggles to explain phenomena such as income differences between men and women with similar education and experience (Walters, 2006). Similarly, it may be difficult for human capital theory to capture how the unique characteristics of the Northern Ontario labour market contribute to the experience of graduates as they enter the workforce.

The development of a highly skilled workforce is an important foundation for regional economic development in Northern Ontario. The population of Northern Ontario is predicted to shrink as a proportion of the provincial population from 6% in 2011 to 4.6% in 2036 (Cuddy, 2015). An aging population and youth outmigration will compound the challenges the region will face in the coming decades.

The knowledge economy is less developed in Northern Ontario than it is in the rest of the province (Conteh & Segworth, 2013). The region still heavily relies on primary and resource-based industries that are in a perpetual state of decline and fluctuation. In turn, post-secondary education, and universities in particular, are poised to play a leadership role in the nurturance and development of a highly skilled workforce. In order to do so, universities must understand which particular skill sets are associated with success in the Northern Ontario labour market. Moreover, universities need to produce graduates who possess hope and optimism for their career prospects in Northern Ontario and who possess the entrepreneurial spirit necessary to continue the diversification of the northern economy.

The education system in Northern Ontario must align with northern realities and contribute to northern prosperity. In Chapter Eight of Conteh and Segworth (2013), Dr. David Robinson of Laurentian University suggests the education system is failing young people in the north by preparing them to leave the region. The school-to-work transition is a critical point of departure; research in the United States shows that

difficulties in this early transition can have lifelong consequences (Roksa & Arum, 2012). Universities and communities need to understand the experiences of youth going through the school-to-work transition if they are to adapt or develop programs and policies to support the transition.

Exploring the school-to-work transition for university graduates in Northern Ontario is important for multiple reasons. First, this research provides an in-depth understanding of the school-to-work transition from the perspective of recent graduates and service providers who are immersed in the realities of supporting the transition. This in-depth understanding from the perspectives of those who are experiencing and supporting the transition provides important insight to policy makers, post-secondary institutions, and employers. In turn, this research could influence the development and delivery of labour market policy and programs, as well as post-secondary programming (academic and co-curricular).

Second, Algoma University will benefit from gaining a greater understanding of which knowledge, skills, and support services are perceived as helpful in navigating the school-to-work transition in Sault Ste. Marie. This knowledge could help the institution to build on strengths and incorporate programming where there is currently none. Finally, this type of exploratory research enhances understanding of how graduates experience the unique features of the Northern Ontario labour market. Human capital theory is based on assumptions that may not hold true in the unique Northern Ontario

context. A better understanding of the hidden features and context of Northern Ontario culture as it impacts upon the school-to-work transition for university graduates could result in the emergence of a theory that explains these nuances at a broad conceptual level. This understanding could form a basis for collective action that meets the needs of northern students and communities.

1.6 Definition of Terms

The following terms are used throughout this study and are defined below:

Constructivist Lens

A lens that views learning as a process whereby individuals construct meaning from their individual perspectives and knowledge (Merriam et al., 2007).

Culture

The beliefs, customs, arts, etc., of a particular society, group, place, or time (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Human Capital Theory

Human capital theory espouses that the stock of knowledge, creativity, and cognitive abilities gained through investment in education is directly related to greater productivity and higher earnings (Moazzami, 2015).

Northern Ontario

Northern Ontario is defined as the region served by the six workforce planning councils that form the Northern Ontario Workforce Planning (NOWP). This includes areas north of Parry Sound, west of North Bay, and extends through Sudbury, Timmins, Sault Ste. Marie, and Thunder Bay to the border of Manitoba. Northern Ontario includes many First Nation communities and reaches north to the James Bay and Hudson Bay coast.

Overeducation

Overeducation occurs if an individual's level of education is above 80% of people employed in the same occupation (Barone & Ortiz, 2011).

Recent Graduate

An individual who has graduated from an undergraduate university program in the past ten years.

School-to-Work Transition

The dynamic process that takes place in the time it takes following graduation until one establishes gainful employment (Finnie, 1999).

Student Mobility

Student mobility in this study refers to national or within-system mobility between programs and institutions within Ontario and throughout Canada.

Youth Outmigration

The number of youth aged 15 to 29 who are leaving the Northern Ontario region (Cuddy, 2015).

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter provides a review of the literature organized around several themes that serve to provide a foundation for this study. The four themes addressed in this chapter are: the school-to-work transition; the post-secondary learning environment and student supports; the role of expectations; and, the skills gap. These four sections contextualize this study by situating the research in the broader, international context.

2.1 School-to-Work Transition

The school-to-work transition is a topic of study that has emerged in recent years as more and more countries move towards mass higher education. Much of the research is quantitative in nature, and examines graduate earnings or employment status following a specified period of time after graduation (Finnie, 2004; Walter, 2006; Walters & Frank, 2010). Some of the research focuses on graduates' perceptions of their skills, knowledge, and abilities post-graduation, and how these perceptions have contributed to their experiences in the school-to-work transition (Al Shayeb, 2013; Coetzee & Esterhuizen, 2010; Daniels & Brooker, 2014; Wood & Kaczynski, 2007). Overall, however, the literature on the school-to-work transition remains quite limited.

The most concerted attempts in the literature to study the school-to-work transition have taken place in the European Union. One major project undertaken in Europe is the Research into Employment and Professional FLEXibility (REFLEX) project.

REFLEX is a major survey of more than 70,000 graduates in 16 different countries five years after graduation in which respondents reflect on aspects of graduates' experiences in post-secondary education, work, and other areas of life (Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market, 2007). REFLEX data demonstrates there are some countries and fields of study that have difficulty matching skills developed in post-secondary education with the labour market, in particular the United Kingdom and the humanities (Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market, 2007). Researchers have used REFLEX data to study topics related to the school-to-work transition, including overeducation and career mobility patterns.

REFLEX data has been used to examine early career mobility. Lindberg (2009) looked at mobility within the system and found variability between countries with respect to the relationship between student mobility and early career mobility for students who had graduated in the year 2000. Lindberg (2009) found that in countries with more heavily regulated labour markets such as Finland and Germany, graduates typically have a smooth transition to the labour market and are more likely to gain employment in a job closely related to their field of study. In contrast, graduates of the post-secondary system in the United Kingdom often begin their careers in jobs that may be unrelated to their area of study and experience more job-to-job mobility in their early careers. Graduates in the UK build up professional skills and experience gradually

through training provided by employers and by regular movement through jobs in the early years of their career.

The school-to-work transition in European countries has been examined in other ways. Gartell (2012) explored the college-to-work transition during the 1990s in Sweden by analyzing the time it took for recent Swedish college graduates to find a full-time job lasting six months or more in the period between 1991 and 1999. The analysis used search theory as the theoretical framework. Search theory describes each individual who is currently unemployed and looking for work as having a 'reservation wage' (Gartell, 2012). Individuals will accept offers of employment with wages above the reservation wage and will reject offers that are below. By extension, search theory finds individuals with higher levels of education have higher reservation wages and that the reservation wage is dependent upon a series of variables including education level and duration of unemployment (Gartell, 2012). The analysis showed that an increased supply of individuals with post-secondary education over the 1990s did not impact upon graduates' abilities to find work, however, for those who did find themselves unemployed after graduation the longer the duration of unemployment the more difficult it was to find work (Gartell, 2012). This quantitative analysis demonstrates the labour market in some countries is able to absorb increasing numbers of graduates with post-secondary education.

The dynamics of the school-to-work transition were examined in a 2004 analysis of French data. Tchibozo (2004) compared which parts of the school-to-work transition are deterministic and which are chaotic in France. Chaotic was defined as when changing strategies has no effect on the end result while deterministic means that preexisting variables such as gender and social status determine ones position in the labour market (Tchibozo, 2004). Data came from a survey administered in 2000 to 6,489 individuals by the Rhone-Alpes District Observatory of School-to-Work transition. The analysis used seven factors shown to influence the school-to-work transition in previous studies: gender, age, degree course, and the date, specialty, level, and place of the highest qualification (Tchibozo, 2004). Tchibozo (2004) concluded the school-to-work transition is a mix of deterministic and chaotic parts and suggests this knowledge could inform career counsellors who may mistakenly assume the educational and economic backgrounds of graduates are the same. The dynamics of the school-to-work transition are important to understand given the movement in post-secondary education to provide equal opportunity to students from all backgrounds.

The school-to-work transition has been a topic of interest in the United States for some time. The 1990s saw the emergence and widespread use of new technology and in particular the World Wide Web in the workplace. Researchers began to examine if a traditional liberal-arts degree was still preparing graduates for the transition to the world of work. In 1996, Lunney, Gardner, and Williams used the Career Beliefs Inventory

and the Liberal Arts Career Beliefs and Expectations survey to compare the expectations and actual experiences of graduates from 21 liberal-arts colleges in the United States. A year into their first work experience, graduates reported a drop in how much they connected their academic experience with their careers (Lunney et al., 1996). These graduates also reported perceived deficiencies in computer skills, being flexible in job requirements, and general knowledge of how the world operates (Lunney et al., 1996). Recommendations from this study focused on enhancing the link between academics and the world of work by embedding career preparedness into the academic curriculum.

The 2008 recession and housing crisis in the United States placed a renewed focus on the school-to-work transition for university graduates. Roksa and Arum (2012) explored how recent graduates were faring in times of economic crisis by surveying 925 individuals two years after graduation. The study found that university graduates in 2010 had the highest unemployment rate ever recorded at 9.1% (Roksa & Arum, 2012). The survey showed only half of the 925 graduates surveyed were working full-time and those who were had a mean salary of \$34,900 (Roksa & Arum, 2012). The researchers used scores on the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA), an objective measure of critical thinking, complex reasoning and writing skills, to compare CLA scores with graduate outcomes. Graduates with low CLA scores were more likely to be unemployed, have credit card debt, live at home, and were less likely to read the news and be able to

discuss politics and current events (Roksa & Arum, 2012). The development of generic competencies such as critical thinking, complex reasoning, and writing skills must be a primary concern for post-secondary institutions.

In Canada, the school-to-work transition is a topic of research that is only recently gaining traction. Particularly in tough economic times, higher education leadership and policy makers are advocating for a better match of knowledge, skills, and abilities with the realities and requirements of the modern labour market. A recent article in the *Globe and Mail* by Don Drummond, Ross Finnie, and Harvey Weingarten suggests a top priority for the new federal government must be a better alignment between the post-secondary education system and the labour market (Drummond et al., 2015). In 2013, *Maclean's* magazine published an article titled "Universities are good at Imparting Knowledge, but though they have Career Counselling Centres, most fail when it comes to Teaching Students how to get a Job." The article describes the personal experience of Mike St. Jean, a student in his seventh year studying political science at Lakehead University, who is still trying to figure out what his university degree is preparing him for (Dehaas, 2013). Canadian popular media is increasingly interested in the topic of school-to-work transition.

Ken Coates wrote a report in March 2015 titled "Career Ready: Towards a National Strategy for the Mobilization of Knowledge Potential." The report, commissioned by the Canadian Council of Chief Executives (CCEE), is a scathing

commentary on Canada's workforce development policy and suggests "policy is driven by a desire to placate parents rather than respond to the workforce needs" (Coates, 2015, p. 4). Coates speaks to the challenges recent graduates are having finding secure, well-paying employment in Canada and suggests multiple intersecting factors are contributing to these challenges. These factors include a sense of entitlement in today's youth, misperceptions that a university degree is the key to success, lack of publically available data on the experience of graduates, and an education system that is more accommodating than in previous generations (Coates, 2015). Coates proposes a drastic reduction in university enrolment (25-30%) with a simultaneous refocus on applied learning and high-demand programming that prepares students directly for careers (Coates, 2015). The narrative around the school-to-work transition suggests change is needed if Canada is to keep pace as a nation.

There is some Canadian research on the school-to-work transition. Ross Finnie has done work to quantitatively analyze graduate outcomes based on the results of the National Graduates Survey (NSG). The NGS survey is a representative survey that examines the experiences of Canadian post-secondary graduates two- and five-years after graduation. Finnie (2004) looked at three cohorts of students who graduated in 1982, 1986, and 1990 and used human capital perspectives to look at how knowledge and skills developed during post-secondary studies are used and developed after graduation. He found the job-education match to be high, particularly for graduates at

the Masters and PhD levels (Finnie, 2004). These findings are consistent with the analysis of Coates in suggesting the job-skills match was more consistent and easily navigated in the 1980s and 1990s.

More recently, Walters and Frank (2010) explored the labour market outcomes for graduates in Ontario based on level of schooling and field of study. The Ontario education system is rooted in the assumptions of human capital theory and operates on the basic premise that increased demand for skilled labour requires an increased investment in education and training to increase participation rates and future earning potential (Walters & Frank, 2010). Regression analysis was used to examine the key explanatory variables influencing labour market outcomes for the 2005 cohort of graduates in Ontario, a cohort transitioning from school-to-work during a time of brisk technological change. Engineering and computer science graduates were found to have the highest earnings, followed by health and business (Walters & Frank, 2010). Liberal arts graduates were found to be the least likely to find full-time employment two years after graduation while university graduates with advanced degrees had the best chance of being employed full-time in the same time period (Walters & Frank, 2010). The results generally support the assumption of human capital theory that higher levels of education lead to better labour market outcomes with the exception of male graduates of trades programs who experienced greater labour market success than male college diploma graduates in non-trades programs (Walters & Frank, 2010). Consistent with

human capital theory, Ontario graduates from technical and applied fields with advanced university degrees were the most successful in terms of future earnings and the ability to find a full-time job.

The Ontario Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities funded a research project in 2015 to examine educational pathways and labour market outcomes in the province of Ontario. Wheelahan et al. (2015) used data from the 2013 National Graduate Survey to look at links between post-secondary education and the labour market using program of study and qualification level as variables. In Ontario, between 30 to 42% of post-secondary graduates reported feeling they were overqualified for the main job they held in 2013 (Wheelahan et al., 2015). The results broken down by program of study demonstrate a proportion of graduates in Ontario reported feeling overqualified in all program categories in 2013. In Physical Sciences, for instance, 45% of Ontario graduates felt overqualified as compared to 36% when looking at the results across Canada (Wheelahan et al., 2015). The research revealed the alignment between qualifications and labour market outcomes was stronger for regulated professions such as nursing and weaker for graduates of broader disciplines such as the liberal arts (Wheelahan et al., 2015). This lack of alignment in broader fields helps explain the varied and non-linear pathways many Ontario university graduates are forging between credentials and the labour market.

The school-to-work transition in Northern Ontario has not been examined in the literature. Northern Ontario is a vast region with several unique challenges including an aging population, low fertility rates, youth out-migration, and an inability to attract and retain new immigrants (Moazzami, 2015). The school-to-work transition is of particular importance in Northern Ontario where the economic prospects of recent graduates are closely tied to the economic health of the regions and communities in which they seek employment. The connection between economic development and labour market prospects has resulted in a migration of the population from rural and small towns to larger urban centres in the North between 2001 to 2011 (Moazzami, 2015). The results of this migration is a concentration of more highly educated individuals ('human capital') in urban centres where there are better labour market prospects.

Moazzami (2015) developed a human capital index for rural and urban Northern Ontario in an effort to test whether the earnings gap between rural and urban populations can be attributed to the education levels of its residents. Moazzami (2015) found that both human capital and the presence of agglomeration economies both have an impact. Agglomeration economics refers to the effects of size and networks present in larger centres that give organizations a competitive advantage (Moazzami, 2015). Human capital refers to the payoff in terms of higher productivity and earnings for individuals who have invested in higher levels of education (Moazzami, 2015). The development of a human capital index for Northern Ontario has implications for the

school-to-work transition. Recent graduates who wish to return or relocate to rural areas or small towns in the north may face challenges directly related to the economic prospects of these communities and regions. The relative impact of agglomeration economies and human capital index may impact upon the experience of the school-to-work transition as graduates attempt to navigate a nuanced labour market in Northern Ontario.

2.2 Post-Secondary Learning Environment and Student Supports

The influence of the post-secondary learning environment and associated student supports on the school-to-work transition has been examined in the literature. Primarily, this research examines co-curricular and curricular supports and the impact of particular environments or supports on the school-to-work transition. This research is valuable in highlighting best practices in other jurisdictions.

A 2007 study out of the Netherlands used data from the Higher Education and Graduate Employment in Europe (CHEERS) project to examine graduates' self-perceptions of competencies three- to four-years after graduation and the types of learning environments in which the graduates' studied. The results show graduates who studied in a problem-based or project-oriented environment where they had to apply theoretical knowledge acquired more general and reflective competencies such as planning, reflective thinking, and working as a team (Vaatstra & DeVries, 2007). In

addition, transferable skills such as working independently and working in a team were reported more often in graduates who had spent more time participating in extracurricular activities and working than those who did not. The finding suggest the curricular and co-curricular activities both have an impact on the development of competencies that help graduates navigate the school-to-work transition.

The impact of career counselling and support in post-secondary institutions on the school-to-work transition has been examined. A Romanian study found that 50% of students in Romanian universities acknowledge they require assistance with planning for the transition yet few are accessing career resources (Litoui & Oproiu, 2012). The Romanian system is distinctive in that only 8% of eligible students are permitted to enroll in post-secondary education as spaces are allocated by the government based on labour market demand (Litoui & Oproiu, 2012). Even in this tightly regulated environment, strong career counselling and support is needed in order to prepare increasingly mobile graduates for the world of work. Interestingly, even though half of the students surveyed acknowledged they need assistance, few were accessing the career counselling and support in Romanian institutions.

A recent study in South Africa found that career guidance during the school-to-work transition can help graduates cope with the school-to-work transition in a country with high youth unemployment. The researchers examined coping resources and their relation to behaviors that positively contribute to career self-management for

unemployed recent graduates (Coetzee & Esterhuizen, 2010). The results of this analysis identified coping resources such as self-esteem and the ability to form social support networks as important areas to develop in career support programs (Coetzee & Esterhuizen, 2010). A positive experience with career counselling and support can have an impact on the school-to-work transition in difficult labour markets.

A 2007 study explored the link between academia and the work world by comparing the perceptions of students in the United States and Australia. The study compared the experiences of American graduates who had participated in a structured work experience program during their studies with Australian graduates who had graduated from a mathematics program and proceeded directly to the workforce (Wood & Kaczynski, 2007). Graduates from the structured work experience program reported in-service training, engaged supervisors, and experiential hands-on work experience as helpful with 85% reporting an influence on career choices (Wood & Kaczynski, 2007). In contrast, mathematics graduates in Australia felt they were seriously underprepared for work and in particular for the job search process, the office environment, and dealing with colleagues and managers (Wood & Kaczynski, 2007). The results suggest deliberate programmatic approaches to supporting the school-to-work transition are helpful.

Many American universities are addressing the gap in school-to-work preparedness programmatically. DeSales University has a 'Senior Success Series' that

extends its first year experience program to the final year of study. Students participate in eight monthly sessions on topics such as networking, creating a brand, job search, professional character, interviewing, and community engagement (Diepenbrock & Gibson, 2012). The University of Georgia has a career academy that includes panel and breakout sessions with employers (Diepenbrock & Gibson, 2012). The University of Florida runs an Opportunity Scholars and Academy of Leadership Program for first generation students that includes peer mentoring and other activities that promote leadership understanding, self-awareness, career preparedness, and global citizenship (Diepenbrock & Gibson, 2012). Each programmatic approach is a focused attempt by institutions to address the perceived gap between the development of disciplinary expertise and career preparedness.

The school-to-work transition can be made more successful in difficult economies by developing a graduates' skills around career adaptability. Career adaptability is an individuals' readiness to cope with preparing for and participating in a work role and in dealing with the unpredictable changes that occur as a result of a changing work environment (Koen et al., 2012). Career adaptability includes four constructs: career concern, career control, career curiosity, and career confidence (Koen et al., 2012). Koen et al. (2012) studied the comparative impact over time of a one-day training program designed to enhance participants' career adaptability through exercises that build competencies in all four career constructs. Koen et al. (2012) found

that six months after the training recent graduates reported higher levels of career control, career curiosity, and higher quality employment, when compared to a control group that did not participate in the training. This study demonstrates even a small day-long intervention can have an impact on the school-to-work transition.

2.3 The Role of Expectations

There is international literature examining the impact of the post-secondary experience and students' expectations on labour market outcomes. Shayeb (2013) examined graduate and employer perceptions of finance graduates' knowledge and skills development in the United Arab Emirates. The study concluded there was a discrepancy between the perceptions of graduates and employers with respect to the importance of subject-specific skills. Finance graduates were more likely to think subject-specific skills were important; whereas employers were more likely to value interdisciplinary and interpersonal skills such as communication skills, the ability to work under pressure, and self-confidence (Shayeb, 2013). This disconnect in expectations may impact the school-to-work transition as students focus on building disciplinary knowledge rather than transferable workplace competencies.

Attitude towards work is an important component of expectations around the school-to-work transition. Tomina and Sorana (2012) found that academic engagement is an important precursor to labour market integration in the Romanian system. Students' attitudes towards work were examined using a 17 item scale. The results

suggest that more engaged students are more likely to be interested in the nature of work, whereas less engaged students are more interested in the concrete qualities of a job such as whether a job is well paid or has days off (Tomina & Sorana, 2012). These results hint that attitude and expectations play an important role in the school-to-work transition.

The importance of attitude and expectation in the school-to-work transition is supported elsewhere in the literature. A survey of 577 students in Turkey was conducted to develop a career adaptability and optimism scale for students and recent graduates between 2009 and 2011 (Zorver & Owen, 2014). The scale was developed to build on research that found a positive relationship between optimism and the ability to plan for a future career, get and keep a job, and self-efficacy (Zorver & Owen, 2014). The ability to adapt to a changing labour market grounded in an optimistic hope for one's future prospects supports a positive school-to-work transition.

In Vietnam, the transition from a communist to a market based economy presents an interesting case-study from which to examine the impact of expectations on the school-to-work transition. An exploratory analysis of perceptions of university students, graduates, and employers in Vietnam found that employers experience difficulty finding graduates with the skills they require (Tran, 2013). Meanwhile, graduates are presented with conflicting expectations around the development of soft skills as the economy needs "creative and initiative people, who can work independently

under pressure” (Tran, 2013, p. 633). The Vietnamese example provides a clear illustration of how building realistic expectations in students throughout higher education is an important part of easing the school-to-work transition.

Associated with expectations is the concept of identity development. Daniels and Brooker (2014) argue it is now universally accepted that post-secondary education has a major role to play in workforce preparation. Daniels and Brooker (2014) propose more attention needs to be focused on student identity development as opposed to graduate attributes, as it is identity development that will enable graduates to acquire and operationalize graduate attributes in the workplace. A focused effort to integrate student identity development throughout post-secondary studies may help recent graduates be flexible and better able to adapt to a rapidly changing global labour market (Daniels & Brooker, 2014). Reflection on the role of student identity development is one component of a holistic approach to looking at factors affecting the school-to-work transition.

2.4 The Skills Gap

A looming skills gap is commonly reported in Canadian popular media. The Conference Board of Canada suggests a skills shortage in Ontario will cost “the economy \$24.3 billion in forgone GDP and \$3.7 billion in provincial tax revenues annually” (Conference Board of Canada, 2017). Whether or not the skills gap exists in Canada has not been established in the academic literature.

Barone and Ortiz (2011) conducted a study to examine the phenomenon of overeducation in a selection of countries in the European Union. The study used data from the 2005 REFLEX survey to conduct a comparative analysis of the incidence of overeducation in eight countries with different post-secondary education systems. By examining overeducation, the study sought to determine if strong participation in post-secondary education has outpaced demand for the skills, knowledge, and abilities that are developed in post-secondary education.

Barone and Ortiz (2011) concluded that overeducation exists at a moderate level in all but one of the countries with high rates of post-secondary attainment. The one exception was Spain, where overeducation was found to be common. In Spain, the high rates of overeducation are thought to be a result of a transition to mass higher education without a simultaneous increase in labour market need for skilled workers (Barone & Ortiz, 2011). The social fabric of Spain is markedly different from countries such as Norway and Finland with lower levels of overeducation. These Nordic countries have moved to mass higher education with a simultaneous commitment to expand the numbers of professional-type occupations in the public sector that require post-secondary credentials (Barone & Ortiz, 2011).

REFLEX data has been used to examine the development of entrepreneurship skills in a number of European countries. Zamfir et al. (2013) used 2005 REFLEX data to look at the likelihood of entrepreneurship for recent graduates and the factors that

influence it. In the 13 countries examined, they found 10.3% of graduates had no job five years after leaving education, with France, Italy, Finland, and Spain having the highest incidence of unemployment (Zamfir et al., 2013). Zamfir et al. (2013) used logistic binomial regression to determine that country, field of study, gender, age, and values such as work autonomy, having new challenges, enjoying social status, and good career prospects are the variables most closely related to being an entrepreneur. Interestingly, traditional teaching methods were shown to reduce the likelihood of students going on to become entrepreneurs. Problem-based learning and oral presentations are most closely associated with the likelihood of becoming an entrepreneur (Zamfir et al., 2013). Entrepreneurship is one path individuals take to navigate the school-to-work transition, and understanding characteristics and teaching methods associated with entrepreneurship helps policy makers and post-secondary institutions support the transition.

2.5 Literature Review Summary

The four themes of the literature review are interrelated and form the contextual basis for this study. The commonalities between countries struggling with overeducation and underemployment include early career and education mobility for recent graduates as they struggle to build skills and knowledge that are highly valued in the labour market (Lindberg, 2009; Wheelahan et al., 2015). The literature shows students are not regularly accessing student supports focused on career development yet there is an

expectation higher education will prepare students for meaningful careers upon graduation (Litoui & Oproiu, 2012; Tran, 2013). The looming skills gap in Canada is a regular topic in the popular media that may influence current policy directives such as the Premier's Highly Skilled Workforce initiative and the push for experiential learning. The ways in which Algoma University graduates experience the school-to-work transition in Northern Ontario is influenced by the broader social and political context, including the school-to-work transition; the post-secondary learning environment and student supports; expectations; and, the skills gap.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides a detailed description of the methodology for this study, including the research design, the perspective used to approach the research, and procedures used for data collection and data analysis. This chapter includes reflections on the researchers' knowledge and role in the field of post-secondary education and the potential impact on this study.

3.1 Research Methodology

The methodology used for this study was qualitative, case study research. This research explored the school-to-work transition of Algoma University graduates in Sault Ste. Marie in order to better understand the school-to-work transition in a Northern Ontario context. Qualitative methodology is commonly used in educational research. A qualitative approach was used in this study because the researcher was seeking to understand a "socially situated, context-related, context-dependent, and context rich" process (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 167). Limitations around time and finances made it necessary for the researcher to narrow the scope of the inquiry from all university graduates across Northern Ontario to the confines of a bounded case study that explored the school-to-work transition of Algoma University graduates in Sault Ste. Marie.

A qualitative case study approach was chosen as the methodology for this study as it supported examining a complex process from the eyes of those who were participating in the process and could capture the multiple perspectives needed to develop an in-depth understanding of the process (Cohen et al., 2007). Case studies provide a way to help readers understand ideas, situations, and experiences by conveying complete stories rather than abstract theories (Cohen et al., 2007). A theoretical pillar of the case study method is its focus on human systems as holistic systems rather than a series of unconnected events (Cohen et al., 2007). The case study provides a way to investigate complex processes that involve human relationships and interrelationships.

A case study approach was ideal for this study as it provided a framework to examine a bounded system in a specific location, specifically the school-to-work transition for Algoma University graduates in Sault Ste. Marie, based on extensive data collection (Creswell, 2008). Originally, the researcher intended to conduct the study using grounded theory methodology. As the study progressed, it became clear a case study approach was more appropriate as the research sought to explore a process rather than generate a theory. This study is an instrumental case study because it serves to illuminate the experiences of multiple Algoma University graduates in Sault Ste. Marie to provide insight to the school-to-work transition in Sault Ste. Marie more generally.

A constructivist lens was used for this study. A constructivist perspective espouses that learning is a process whereby individuals construct meaning from their individual perspectives and knowledge (Merriam et al., 2007). A constructivist paradigm is used for this research to reflect that the experiences of recent graduates in Northern Ontario is grounded in their culture and is actively constructed based on individual's experiences in this culture. This constructivist paradigm is consistent with the common principles of constructivism put forward by Snowman and Biehler (2006, p. 311-312):

1. What a person knows is not just received but is actively constructed by the learner – meaningful learning is the active creation of knowledge from personal experience.
2. One person's knowledge can never be totally transferred to another person because knowledge results from an individual's interpretation of experience which is influenced by a variety of factors.
3. The cultures and societies to which people belong influence their views of the world around them. Even though knowledge is personal, people often agree on what is true and the understandings people reach are largely consistent with a given culture.
4. Changes to an individual's knowledge is facilitated by systematic, open-minded discussions and debates (the sharing of multiple perspectives).

The researcher is employed as an administrator for Algoma University in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. The researcher acknowledges the importance of researcher reflexivity in this study and openly discusses her role and potential bias that may emerge in a way that respects the study participants (Creswell, 2008). In order to foster reflexivity, the researcher included reflections in her journal where she articulated preexisting assumptions and knowledge that may influence her interpretations of the data. Consistent with Charmaz (2006), the researcher recognized it is the researcher's responsibility to be reflexive about what preconceived ideas she brought to the research. These reflections are reported in Chapter Five: Conclusions of this study. Reflexivity is increasingly used to assess the quality of qualitative research and is used in this study to explicitly acknowledge the researcher's influence on the research (Gentles et al., 2014). Particular attention was paid to reflexivity during the data analysis and writing stages of this study.

3.2 Research Design

Using qualitative case study design, this research explored the school-to-work transition of Algoma University graduates in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. Sault Ste. Marie is one of five major urban centres in Northern Ontario with a population of approximately 75,000. Algoma University is a primarily undergraduate university located in Sault Ste. Marie with a population of approximately 1200 students. The university offers a wide range of programming in the liberal arts and sciences, with most of its students

concentrated in Business Administration, Psychology, Computer Science, Biology, and Social Work programming. The student body of Algoma University includes a high proportion of non-traditional students, including mature, Indigenous, First Generation, and students with disabilities. The university has a special mission to foster cross-cultural education between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities rooted in its long history with Indigenous partners and its location on the site of the former Shingwauk Indian Residential School.

This research pursued semi-structured interviews with 27 individuals including Algoma University graduates and individuals who had first-hand involvement supporting the school-to-work transition for Algoma University graduates. Consistent with a constructivist paradigm, the majority of participants had first-hand experience with the school-to-work transition. In addition to the interviews, this study collected relevant documents related to the school-to-work transition and the researcher's personal journal which included notes from relevant events she attended during the study period and self-reflection as a means of ensuring researcher reflexivity.

The researcher was granted permission from the Chief Academic Officer of Algoma University to conduct the majority of the research on site at the university or through its networks of graduates and community partners. The study involved human participants, and approval was sought and received from Memorial University's Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (Appendix A) and Algoma

University's Research Ethics Board (Appendix B). Once ethics approval was received from both Research Ethics Boards, the researcher began to contact participants to engage in the study.

3.3 Participants

Purposeful sampling was used to identify Algoma University graduates and other individuals with direct experience supporting the school-to-work transition (the researcher called these participants 'service providers'). For Algoma University graduates, the researcher included only participants who had graduated from an undergraduate program at Algoma University within the past ten years. The majority of the literature examining the school-to-work transition uses a five-year timeframe from the time of graduation for inclusion of participants (Barone & Ortiz, 2011; Walters, 2006; Wood & Kaczynski, 2007; Zamfir et al., 2013). This study extended the timeframe for analysis to ten years in order to ensure a sufficient number of participants could be found who met the study criteria and to recognize that both periods of outmigration for youth and fluctuations in employment are notable factors in Northern Ontario and may impact the length of the school-to-work transition in Northern Ontario. Participants who had gone on to graduate school or who were not actively seeking to enter the labour market were excluded, with the exception of one individual who pursued graduate school because she was unable to find meaningful work locally. Participants who had

graduated from an undergraduate program but had not yet successfully entered the Northern Ontario labour market were included.

The researcher contacted participants who were recent graduates through email invitations (sample provided in Appendix C). In most cases, email addresses were accessed on public websites in staff directories of a participant's employer. In some cases, the researcher had email addresses in her personal contact list from previous connections she had with recent graduates. Email invitations were also sent out through university email aliases, for example, an open invitation was sent out to all members of the Algoma University Alumni Association. Maximal variation sampling was used to ensure a variety of perspectives were gathered from individuals who differed based on a chosen set of characteristics. These characteristics included gender, age, employment status, undergraduate program (Arts, Science, Social Science, or Professional) and self-identification (Indigenous or non-Indigenous). In addition, the researcher tracked how long ago the participant had graduated from Algoma University. Maximal variation sampling was chosen to more accurately represent the wide variety of perspectives that comprise the lived experience of Algoma University graduates transitioning to the labour market. Of the 27 participants, 14 were recent graduates and 13 were service providers.

Some participants who were recent graduates of Algoma University were also presently employed at Algoma University. The researcher did not approach potential

participants who had a direct reporting relationship to her. Furthermore, the potential participants who were employees at Algoma University were informed in the email invitation that Algoma University was not involved in the study and that participation was not a requirement of employment.

In addition to the participants who were recent graduates, the researcher used purposeful sampling to select individuals who were directly engaged in providing support to Algoma University graduates ('service providers') around navigating the school-to-work transition. These participants included career placement agencies, employment coaches and advisors, and youth program managers, for example. These service providers provided an important perspective to the experience of recent graduates as they worked on a daily basis with graduates to support them in the transition from school-to-work. Examining the process through the lens of service providers added to the richness of analysis and linked the perceptions of recent graduates with the lived experience of service providers who often serve as the bridge between graduates and employers. The researcher approached the Executive Director or Lead Contact for each organization by email and requested permission to reach out to individuals and request an interview. A sample invitation to service providers is included as Appendix D.

Once the study began, snowball sampling was used to identify additional potential participants. The researcher recognized asking participants to identify other

participants could be seen as coercive given the closeness of the local community and the relationship the researcher might have with some participants. As an alternative, the researcher invited participants to forward the invitation to participate to others they felt might be interested.

In total, 27 participants were interviewed in this study. Table 1 provides a summary of the 14 participants who were recent graduates, including a breakdown of their characteristics according to gender, age, employment status, undergraduate program, and self-identification status. Table 2 provides a summary of the 13 participants who were considered service providers. Demographic characteristics were not collected for service providers as the data was not relevant to this study. Instead, a general description of their role as it relates to the school-to-work transition is included in the table.

Table 1: Participant Profiles for Recent Algoma University Graduates

<i>Participant (pseudonym)</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age Range</i>	<i>Employment Status</i>	<i>Program</i>	<i>Self-Identification Status</i>
Ruth	Female	20-24	Contract	Professional	No
Shelley	Female	25-29	Permanent	Professional	No
Adam	Male	25-29	Contract	Arts	No
Chris	Other	25-29	Contract	Professional	No
Leo	Male	25-29	Contract	Professional	No
Sylvie	Female	40-49	Permanent	Professional	No
Cliff	Male	40-49	Unemployed	Arts	No
Tom	Male	20-24	Contract	Professional	No
Kim	Female	25-29	Permanent	Science	No
Hugo	Male	25-29	Contract	Arts	No

Lily	Female	25-29	Contract	Arts	No
Rachelle	Female	25-29	Contract	Arts	No
Trevor	Male	20-24	Contract	Professional	No
Sophie	Female	30-39	Permanent	Professional	Yes

Table 2: Participant Profile for Service Providers

<i>Participant (pseudonym)</i>	<i>Service Provider Role</i>
Bob	Youth programming involvement
Brenda	Youth programming involvement
Curtis	Youth programming involvement
Kathryn	Youth programming involvement
Brad	Workforce planning
Sue	Employment services
Bill	Employment services
Phil	Employment services
Gilbert	Employment services
Martha	Employment services
Julie	Advisor
Hillary	Employment services
Jenn	Advisor

3.4 Data Collection

Interviews were the primary method of data collection for this study. For practical and ethical reasons, interviews were convenient for individuals who were in the work force as they could be arranged at times that were convenient for the participant and the organizations in which they worked. Individual interviews demonstrated respect for the research site as they were less disruptive to the individual's regular work day. Two of the organizations that participated as service providers expressed a preference for group interviews, and these requests were accommodated by the researcher.

The interviews were conducted in locations that were convenient and preferred by the participants in the spring, summer, and fall of 2016. Most interviews took place in private meeting rooms or offices, while a few took place in local coffee shops in cases where the participant preferred a public space. An Informed Consent Form and Information Sheet was carefully reviewed with each participant at the start of each interview and is provided as Appendix E. In addition, participants were provided with a printed directory of where to get help in Sault Ste. Marie if the participant was experiencing mental distress. The Informed Consent Form and Information Sheet was signed by all participants and no participants experienced mental distress in the interview.

The average interview was 30 minutes in duration. All participants interviewed gave permission for the researcher to use direct quotes in the research report using assigned pseudonyms. Given the relatively small size of the local community, participants were reassured the researcher would be mindful to withhold descriptive information that could identify individual participants or their organizations in the writing of the research report.

In keeping with the constructivist paradigm, interviews provided a way for the researcher to understand the personal interpretation of the actual lived experience of the school-to-work transition. The interviews began with questions intended to gather demographic information about participants, including program of study, age, gender,

and self-identification status (Indigenous or non-Indigenous). The remainder of the questions were open-ended and semi-structured to provide a framework for participants but to minimize limitations placed on the answers (Cohen et al., 2007). Moreover, open-ended questions are flexible and allow the researcher to build a relationship with the participant (Cohen et al., 2007). Interview questions were developed to solicit feedback related to the research questions. For example, a question for recent graduate participants was “What were your expectations/hopes career-wise when you graduated?” This question was intended to begin a narrative around the participant’s expectations and how their lived experience meshed with these expectations. Other questions were broader and helped the researcher explore the school-to-work transition experience more generally which was a primary goal of the study. The question “tell me about what the school-to-work transition was like for you...walk me through the key experiences related to the transition from graduation until now” was particularly effective in this regard. To ensure the questions made sense in the context of the participant’s role, separate sets of questions were developed for Algoma University graduates and for service providers. These questions are included as Appendix F and G.

The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. In addition, the researcher took handwritten notes during the interviews on aspects of the interview that were particularly relevant to the research questions. The master spreadsheet linking

participant names to pseudonyms was retained in the researcher's locked office during the data collection period and was destroyed when data collection was completed. To establish trust and validity of the research findings, the researcher emailed an interview check-back form to each participant that summarized the interview, identified themes, and included any interpretations made by the researcher. The check-back forms ensured the accuracy of data collection from the interviews and served as a form of member checking where researchers check back with participants to ensure the accuracy of research findings (Creswell, 2008).

In addition to the interviews, data was collected from documents relevant to the school-to-work transition and the researcher's personal journal. The documents collected were publically available reports including the final report of the 2015 Youth Engagement Forum, the Economic Report of Sault Ste. Marie 2008-2013, the Algoma Workforce Investment Corporation 2016 EmployerOne Report, and the Algoma Workforce Investment Corporation 2016 Local Labour Market Planning Report. The documents were reviewed and key findings were included in the researcher's personal journal.

Similarly, the researcher included descriptive and reflective field notes in her journal from events she attended. These events were attended by the researcher as both a participant and nonparticipant observer and were open to the general public. These two events included Algoma's Workforce Symposium, a half day forum on trends

and opportunities for the Algoma district labour market, and an Anishinaabe Alumni Panel Discussion at Algoma University during which five Algoma University alumni who self-identify as Indigenous discussed their experiences after graduation. These events were opportunities to learn more from individuals for whom the transition from university to the labour market was a key concern.

This study concluded when 27 participants had been interviewed. The researcher used Creswell's (2008) rule of thumb for grounded theory data collection by conducting between 20-30 interviews. Charmaz (2006) also suggests saturation in grounded theory research may occur at 25 interviews for smaller projects. The researcher was not identifying any new major themes or adding any additional detail to the identified themes once 27 interviews had been completed (Creswell, 2008) and it was concluded that saturation had occurred.

3.5 Data Analysis

Creswell (2008) provided the steps needed to analyze the qualitative data. This analysis is included in Chapter Four. As the interviews were completed, the researcher sent the transcriptions back to the participants to ensure accuracy of the interview notes. Once the participant confirmed the accuracy of the notes, the researcher read through the transcript to get a preliminary sense of the data and made notes in the margins of initial thoughts, ideas, and concepts. Once the researcher had a good sense

of the data, the transcript was uploaded to *Dedoose*, a software program used for qualitative data analysis.

In *Dedoose*, each transcript from an interview with a recent graduate was assigned descriptors to represent the characteristics used for maximal variation sampling: gender; age; employment status; undergraduate program (Arts, Science, Social Science, or Professional); self-identification (Indigenous or non-Indigenous); and, year of graduation. Transcripts from service providers, the researcher's journal, and relevant reports were uploaded with no descriptors assigned. *Dedoose* was chosen as the software program because it is easy to use, has a reasonable cost, includes a function for memo writing, and has an intuitive system for coding that allows for easy review and sorting. These functions are suggested by Creswell (2008) as important for software programs used in qualitative data analysis.

Constant comparison data analysis was the process used as the researcher began to code the data. Constant comparison is an iterative process in which the researcher gathers data, sorts it into categories, then returns to the data to develop more categories and compare these with categories that already exist (Creswell, 2008). This process results in themes and theories emerging from the data that are grounded in the data as the analysis moves from specific to broad (Creswell, 2008). This process of constant comparison occurred throughout the data analysis phase.

The coding process began using the principle of lean coding. The researcher assigned codes to text segments in *Dedoose* and tried to limit the number of codes in each transcription to approximately 10-15 so the codes were not too cumbersome (Creswell, 2008). Using the principals of constructivism, the researcher used in vivo codes as much as possible to reflect participant's perspectives in their own words. The first round of coding resulted in 31 codes. These codes were examined and collapsed into 21 codes to reduce overlap and redundancy (Creswell, 2008). Finally, the 21 codes were grouped into five main themes. An overview of all codes in table format is included as Appendix H. These five themes reflect the codes participants mentioned most frequently as well as those that emerged once the researcher's personal journal and documents relevant to the school-to-work transition were compared to the codes from the participants.

Data analysis focused on rich description related to the five themes. These detailed descriptions are foundational to case study research as the researcher sought to relate data from a variety of sources to help the reader understand the school-to-work transition process in a specific setting (Creswell, 2008). *Dedoose* was a valuable tool in creating the rich descriptive analysis as all codes were linked to text segments and quotes from participants that are included in Chapter Four. The researcher was mindful of researcher reflexivity as the rich description and interrelation of themes was developed. The data support specific recommendations in terms of ways to support the

school-to-work transition for Algoma University graduates in Sault Ste. Marie and these recommendations are described in Chapter Four and discussed further in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

This chapter shares the results of the study. The findings are organized in accordance with the thematic responses that emerged during the interviews conducted by the researcher. The findings of this research are organized into five main themes: (a) preparation in curriculum; (b) work experience; (c) expectation clash; (d) networking; and, (e) soft skills.

The results of the study include qualitative data primarily in the form of direct participant responses and quotations from the interviews. The semi-structured interview questions for recent graduates and service providers are included as Appendix F and G. Where relevant, researcher observation and reflection are reported. The participant responses are presented using participant pseudonyms to protect anonymity.

The study participants consisted of recent graduates and service providers. The study found a substantial overlap in themes for both groups and significant interaction between the five themes. Where differences in perspectives were found between the two groups, these differences are reported in this Chapter in accordance with the corresponding theme. Similarly, where recent graduate participant responses were found to vary in accordance with the demographic characteristics in Table 1 these differences are reported.

4.1 Theme One: Preparation in Curriculum

The first theme that emerged from the data was preparation in curriculum. One of the interview questions for recent graduates asked “While you were in university, did you access support services you felt would help you prepare for the world of work? Tell me about how you feel these services influenced the school-to-work transition.” Many participants were not aware of university services in this area, or even if they were, did not think to access these services. Participant Ruth explained:

“it is so intense when you are in school...I was so involved, taking course overloads...and then I was done. I wasn’t even aware there were transition services through student services and I was very aware of the services they (student services) offer.”

Other participants, such as Cliff, simply answered this question by saying *“there was nothing I was aware of at the university.”*

Recent graduates who were aware of services offered by Algoma University to support the school-to-work transition explained why they did not access these services. According to Shelley:

“student services at Algoma University are very specialized, e.g., Anishinaabe, First Generation, international, and I didn’t fit into any of those groups so I wasn’t really targeted for any of their services. I could have reached

out for these services, but all of their advertising was targeted to specific groups.”

Recent graduate Adam described his thoughts on seeking support:

“I am one of those terrible examples of students who do not access student supports at all. I think just because, I did well academically, I was cum laude when I graduated, so I didn’t feel like I needed the support.”

Service providers had a different perspective on why students tend not to access services while in university. Service provider Curtis described his perspective:

“the university has tons, but do I need to access them (referring to question from a student perspective). Why would you fix something when it is not broken in your head? Then, they go for employment after and they think they are prepared.”

This perspective was echoed by service provider Julie *“I don’t think they have any idea in school how tough it is going to be until they get out”* and service provider Kathryn *“I think there are opportunities within the school to help them with the transition but students don’t have the initiative or knowledge to take advantage of these things.”* The general sentiment from service providers was that students are not motivated to seek assistance for the school-to-work transition while in university

because they don't see the importance of these services until they are actively looking for employment.

The majority of participants sought assistance with the school-to-work transition from community service providers after graduation. This assistance included help with resume writing, individualized job search assistance, one-on-one employment counselling, and access to local job posting postings. Participants were generally pleased with the scope and quantity of resources available in the community even if their interaction with a service provider did not directly result in a job. Tom described his experience accessing resources:

"to get my resumes printed off and checked over, that was huge. This year, I went back because they have c.v. writing workshops...that really helped, sitting down one-on-one with somebody."

Service provider Brad echoed the understanding that there are many local resources:

"there is lots of help and resources available to new graduates who are proactive. There is support within the community outside of the university and the college to help people stay."

While participants who were recent graduates expressed a general lack of awareness or lack of desire to access services intended to support the school-to-work transition while in university, both recent graduates and service providers described an

expectation that the university has a role in preparing students for the world of work. Participants who were recent graduates felt the university was extremely supportive and deliberate about preparing students for graduate school but not for employment. Recent graduate participant Ruth described *“I felt the pressure in university is to continue with schooling. The pressure is not to build your job skills.”* Recent graduate participant Cliff and Rachelle echoed this sentiment *“for those students going on to graduate school, I think it is easier (Cliff)”* and *“for whatever reason, the university seems to want to funnel students into further postsecondary education (Rachelle).”* The theme preparedness in curriculum emerged from explicit recommendations by service providers and recent graduates who described the most helpful university experiences in terms of preparation for work as required components of their programs.

All service providers felt that preparation for work should be an explicit part of the curriculum in university. Service provider Hillary described her rationale *“If you make it optional, they are probably not going to come, they’re busy, they have homework, they just don’t know it is important.”* Furthermore, service providers suggested incorporating preparedness for work into the curriculum at an early stage to maximize the benefit. Service provider Sue described *“and learning about it from the very beginning, before they even go in. You need to work backwards...I know it’s hard for a lot of them to decide what you want to do with your life.”* Service provider Kathryn suggested *“It has to be worked into the classroom somehow and it needs to be*

connected to their marks. If there was some way to discuss career perspectives in first year, this might infuse this fire at the very beginning through their whole education.”

Service provider Curtis described his experience:

“because it is not mandatory students will always find something better to do – it has to come in through degree requirements or in the classroom - one class has to be dedicated to it so they get it. It can’t be optional.”

One service provider participant, who was also a recent graduate, described his experience in an Algoma University class when invited in by the professor:

“I did a presentation about how to prepare after university. I got a lot of feedback in terms of – we had no idea at all about things like approaches to a job search, resume writing, what employers are looking for, labour market information, and so on.”

Service providers see significant benefit to incorporating preparation for the school-to-work transition within the curriculum.

Recent graduates commonly pointed to examples in the curriculum when asked to describe those experiences in university that best prepared them for the school-to-work transition. Examples were found more commonly in professional programs including Business Administration and Community Economic and Social Development (CESD). Recent graduate Sophie described her experience:

“I think it (my program) did a great job because of the program selected and the placements within it. We had 450 hours of placement, that itself, plus all the courses, it brought in that community piece whether it was speakers or community projects, right away it started preparing me for the workplace.”

Recent graduate Ruth described the benefits of participating in the Northern Ontario Case Competition *“some key aspects were helpful such as the case competition. The case competition is huge to expose you to business owners in the north. There is a luncheon and every student has to sit beside a business owner.”* Even minor factors like the incorporation of *“actual cases with real life companies (Trevor)”* into course work was perceived as beneficial by recent graduates. Required placements were seen as valuable as were required assignments that linked students to the community in which they would be seeking employment.

Recent graduate participants perceive the experience of faculty to play a role in how well preparation for the school-to-work transition is incorporated into the curriculum. Recent graduate participant Ruth appreciated when part-time instructors were hired from the community so students could *“learn more about what they do.”* Recent graduate participant Chris described how:

“my university professors were all workers in the field. They all had the work experience and that is how they were taught, it wasn’t someone who had a university degree and was going in with just that.”

Moreover, faculty sometimes play a role in linking students to job opportunities or in supplying advice on employment. As recent graduate participant Shelley explained *“any kind of advice I got was from faculty.”* Recent graduate participant Trevor described his interaction with faculty in terms of his job search:

“I really enjoyed getting to know your professors. They have those contacts in the community too that can help you out. Since I’ve been in this role I’ve gotten two to three other job postings from professors.”

Service provider participant Chris provided his thoughts on the responsibility this implies for university faculty *“professors do have a duty, there is teacher glorification, and there is still the understanding that you are an educator, you will tell me. Some teachers think it is not their responsibility, but it kind of is.”* The perception of recent graduate and service provider participants is the experience of faculty has an influence on the way students experience the school-to-work transition.

4.2 Theme Two: Work Experience

The second theme that emerged from the data was work experience. All participants emphasized the importance of work experience in preparing for the school-to-work transition. Participants described the ways in which they gained work experience and the barriers to gaining this experience in the community. Four specific subthemes emerged under the theme of work experience around internships, a desire for more hands on learning, a desire for more practical experience, and technical skill

development. Many of the subthemes around work experience interrelate with the results presented in Theme One: Preparation in Curriculum.

Service provider and recent graduate participants spoke of the value work experience has in preparing an individual for the transition from school to work. Participants who had completed a co-op placement spoke of how the co-op program facilitated gaining work experience. Sophie described her experience:

“making use of co-op programs and community employment programs was very important in terms of getting my foot in the door. Having that professional feedback and that extra set of eyes checking things.”

Positive perceptions of the co-op program were weighted towards the work experience component rather than the in-class portion. Recent graduate participant Trevor described his experience:

“I did the co-op program and graduated with the co-op certificate so I did all three co-op placements and the class. It was a good learning experience, it opened up more job opportunities throughout the summer. I’m sure it did make a difference but there is nothing quantitative like saying ‘I took this course and it was beneficial.’ It was more the work experience and getting to know how to deal with different managers, working with students, and planning events. It did benefit me.”

Other recent graduate participants reinforced the value of the co-op program in gaining work experience. Recent graduate participant Leo noted:

“To be honest, it did help a great deal. As soon as I finished school, I secured a short term contract position. Without my experience in co-op positions, I don’t think I would have been able to get the short-term contract. It was a huge benefit to have work experience, not everybody has work experience, it definitely played a role in securing short-term employment after graduation.”

Recent graduate participant Bob shared a similar perspective *“I think the co-op really helped me because I was able to get the hands-on and make connections within the community.”*

Service provider participant Julie spoke of the importance of co-op in helping students *“get that entry level experience under your belt while you are still in university.”*

Other service providers spoke of the value experiences such as co-ops or practicums had on their personal career path. Service provider participant Jenn stated:

“I did a practicum in criminal justice and wanted to work with young offenders. I worked one summer at the youth detention center and it was an eye-opener for me. I was a mature student and had a lot of work experience, you need to be able to get out there and say ‘I’ve tried this’ because once you get out there and you get a job and you find you don’t like it, then what happens?”

Placements were described by recent graduate participants as valuable for the same reason as co-op, for gaining work experience. Recent graduate Sophie described *“with my program, there were two placements I had to complete which gave me a lot of community experience and an idea of what exactly I wanted to get involved with.”*

Similarly, part-time jobs were found to be valuable forms of work experience. Recent graduate Kim attributed her success in transitioning from school-to-work to:

“I think the rest of my success has to do with always having jobs and having good parents. I held 2-3 jobs all the way through. This made school very hard...so that helped me because I knew what it meant to have a work ethic and a job.”

Recent graduate participant Tom *“had a part-time job to keep him grounded and keep money flowing in.”* Tom recommended *“any work experience is better than no work experience.”* Students who had part-time jobs tended to find the classroom component of the co-op program less valuable as they felt they already had experience with interview skills and as described by Ruth *“it wasn’t new information for me...I didn’t learn anything new that I didn’t already know before.”* One participant expressed a sense of pride from working part time. Recent graduate Cris noted *“I had three jobs while I was in university and was able to graduate with no debt because I worked really hard and I’m proud of that.”*

The importance of work experience emerged alongside recognition of an associated barrier. Service providers and recent graduates identified the tendency for local employers to require a number of years of work experience and a lack of entry level positions make it difficult for recent graduates to gain work experience. To add to the barrier, service provider participant Jenn identified *“you would be surprised how many students don’t work in the summer. Lots of them haven’t really worked before. With these students, I have to start with volunteer experience...”* Service provider participant Bill described his thoughts on the matter *“It is the employers in this city that want people with five to ten years of experience at the outset. There is not a lot of entry level at a decent wage so these young adults can survive.”* Service provider Brad noted:

“Employers are always looking for the perfect fit. Where there might be a disconnect is in investment in individuals, in training, in time, a commitment to bring someone in and bring them up to speed. Part of that is because it is a smaller community, employers are competitive for people and they might think if they train someone and then that person leaves they are losing their investment. That is part of the expectation from the employer’s side.”

Service provider participant Brenda described her experience with local employers *“employers are looking for people with work experience but they can’t get it unless somebody gives them a chance.”*

The first subtheme identified under the general theme of work experience was internships. Many participants who were recent graduates had experience with government-funded internship programs that are unique to Northern Ontario and are intended to assist graduates in gaining entry level work experience. Recent graduate participants who were able to access employment through the internship program generally spoke positively about it. Tom described his thoughts on the program *“I think it is a great program to get people started in their careers, this one year, it is huge, this is what you need to get other jobs.”* Sophie described her positive experience *“the internship provided a wealth of experience. The people in the community I was able to work with, getting feedback and guidance - that really helped.”*

However, participants did identify barriers associated with the government-funded internship programs. Recent graduate participant Ruth described her frustration at the end of the internship program:

“so I did a year with them and after that year is up there is nothing, which I found leading up to that was very challenging. I liked where I worked...they wanted to keep me but they had no reasonable ability to do so.”

Likewise, Cris felt frustrated towards the end of the internship experience *“my experience is that it is awesome but it only lasts for one year and then you are back to square one. You are only eligible for one year of your life.”*

Service provider participants recognized the barriers inherent in the internship programs as well. Service provider participant Bill describes the double-edged sword of internships:

“It is a one year contract and it is usually not sustainable for the employer to keep them on long term. One year of experience isn’t a lot in the job market. They are experience for the student but the employers are jumping on it because of the money available so they can access the money and not pay someone a salary. Feedback from people who have been engaged in them is they come out saying I don’t really feel like I learned the skills I should have learned. If the position was in business administration, I should have been immersed in marketing, HR, accounting, etc. but instead I did filing and paperwork.”

Further to the barriers recent graduates experience in internship programs, recent graduate participants identified access barriers to these programs. Recent graduate participants who were over the age of 29 or who were not permanent residents in Canada are excluded from applying for internship positions. Participants who were excluded from applying for internship positions expressed a desire to be eligible for these opportunities.

The second subtheme that emerged under the theme of work experience was the desire for more hands-on work in university. Recent graduates and service providers felt a university education is too much theory and not enough hands-on. Many recent

graduate participants described how they might consider a college program to enhance their hands-on skill set. Service provider Brenda described her experience with a post-graduate certificate at a college *“I did a post-graduate certificate at a college and you had to get out and interact with employers through a required work placement. We did hands-on projects that required interacting with employers regularly and so at least some contacts were made.”* Recent graduate participant Adam noted *“I wish there would have been more hands-on in my program, aside from co-op, I mean in the classroom.”*

Some recent graduate participants felt the school-to-work transition would have gone more smoothly had they had more hands-on opportunities in universities. When asked how his university education could have better prepared him for the school-to-work transition, recent graduate participant Leo shared *“most classes were theory-based and involved essays. Looking back, I would say I would prefer to get a lot of the hands-on education.”* Recent graduate participant Trevor described how more hands-on work would have helped him in the workplace:

“A lot of our courses were an overview of everything, like this is how you create a marketing plan, this is how you create a business plan...but now that I am running a program I need to know how to deal with things like Facebook, putting ads in the Sault Star...I can’t create these ads because I don’t have the experience with programs like Adobe Photoshop. I am very reliant on a third

party to do this work for us. Those types of skills would have been really beneficial.”

The third subtheme that emerged under the broader theme of work experience was the desire for more practical experience. The subtheme of more practical experience emerged more strongly from the interviews with service providers and referred to the broad range of basic skills applicable to most jobs: office etiquette, working in teams, writing emails, and managing a calendar, for example. Service provider participants tended to touch on this theme when describing the skills that recent university graduates are lacking. Service provider participant Martha gives an example *“These are not skills students are learning in university. They don’t even know how to write an email properly.”* Service provider participant Kathryn describes the dilemma:

“we focus on pushing content and making sure they have knowledge not skill development. How do we teach them critical thinking, self-awareness, decision making, leadership, team collaboration...we don’t look at competencies in university.”

Service provider participant Curtis summed up his views:

“Somebody has to get to the skills because they (recent graduates) are going to be troubled, reprimanded, and they are going to say no one has ever

taught me this. Don't we owe it to society to create a better pool of potential employees?"

All service provider participants expressed a sentiment that many recent graduates are lacking in foundational practical skills that are necessary in the workplace.

Service provider participant Kathryn spoke of the opportunity universities have to address this gap:

"In terms of strengths, I think there are opportunities starting in university where there is more service learning or deep learning, different learning approaches, where students get those skills. I think more innovative, contemporary universities are really starting to push that competency and skill development. I think that is a success that we've recognized it is an issue and we are starting to address it."

Service provider participant Curtis referenced the emerging narrative on who is responsible for ensuring youth develop practical skills:

"I don't think they (university students) are doing enough real stuff. We just assume kids know why you call in, why you dress appropriately, why there is a uniform...kids are saying 'they can't control me, I have rights'...well so do the employers. The transition has set kids up to be taught, reprimanded, and then they are saying no one taught us this. Well, who is responsible? The college, the

university, the elementary school, the secondary school. And then people say it is the job of the parents. We all know there are a bunch of parents who don't know how to teach this. Let's stop blaming everyone."

One recent graduate participant expressed his awareness of this perceived practical skills gap and expressed a desire to develop more practical skills as part of his university education. Recent graduate participant Tom described his experience learning practical skills by trial and error on his placement:

"The supervisors in the placements provided the direct feedback...I learned by trial and error...oh yes, I screwed up. I sent an email to 200 people that said 'hey guys', so she just ran down but like, how would I know this stuff, right? Immediate feedback from the supervisor, it's scary, there is no manual for this stuff, things like etiquette. Unless you are doing it, you don't know."

Recent graduate participant Tom praised some aspects of his university program for teaching practical skills but still felt even more practical skill development would have helped him.

The fourth subtheme that emerged under the broader theme of work experience was the desire for more technical skills. As with practical experience, the subtheme of more technical skills emerged more strongly from the interviews with service providers. This study differentiates technical skills from practical experience by

considering technical skills as specific competencies graduates could identify (e.g., presentation skills) whereas practical experience refers to those skills employers tend to assume recent graduates have (e.g., the ability to compose a professional email). Service provider participants identified gaps in technical skills such as writing cover letters and resumes, interviewing, budgeting, and general life skills. Service provider participant Jenn describes her experience with resume writing:

“I see it when I advertise for research assistants and students are submitting their resumes and cover letters. I’m thinking they don’t know how to write a cover letter, they don’t know how to present themselves, they don’t know how to read the ad, look at what they have to offer and write it up...when I’m looking at your cover letter and resume you haven’t told me what you have to offer and that’s selling yourself.”

Recent graduate participants were asked in the interviews to identify what skills, knowledge, and values were most valuable in supporting the school-to-work transition. The researcher noted many of the participants had difficulty answering this question. For those who provided a response, the skills identified included event planning, conflict resolution, computer skills, marketing skills, presentation skills, and policy work. Recent graduate participant Leo described how his experience working on the student union helped him develop conflict resolution skills *“I would say conflict resolution. Working on the student union, I had to deal with conflict, either student based or student with*

administration based, so learning how to resolve these issues in a diplomatic way was a skill I had to learn.” Leo also described how presentation skills developed in university were transferable to the workplace:

“Presentation was a huge aspect of my program and I am not the type of person who likes to talk so doing presentations in front of people was not my forte, so definitely the amount of presentations I had to do in university prepared me for my role outside. In my current job I have to do a lot of presentations at high schools so it did give me a comfort level and motivation to present. Some of the courses at the university definitely prepared me.”

4.3 Theme Three: Expectation Clash

The third theme that emerged from the data was expectation clash. This theme describes the conflicting expectations and experiences of recent graduates as they transition from university to the world of work, as well as the reflections of service providers who work with recent graduates and see the contradictory expectations. Four subthemes emerged under the theme of expectation clash: racism; sense of entitlement; tough labour market; and, fear. This section describes the results around expectation clash as an overarching theme and then reports results related to each of the four subthemes.

Recent graduate participants generally reported they expected to be able to transition smoothly to the world of work upon graduation with a university degree. Some reported this expectation began as far back as secondary school. Recent graduate Rachelle reported *“in high school it was my perception that guidance counsellors were pushing everyone to go to university...maybe if I had been told by my guidance counsellor to do plumbing because you will get a job right away I might be better off.”* Recent graduates who were still unemployed or remained in precarious contract work were disappointed the transition did not match their expectations:

“The reason I went back to school is because I am not willing to do the dead end jobs anymore. I wanted to first of all study something that would give me the tools...you have high expectations when you graduate and I have a lot to offer. I am not a weak person, I have been through worse, but you think when you make an investment you expect a return and you expect that credential is going to connect you to a job faster than it is (recent graduate participant Cliff).”

Expectations were more closely aligned for a recent graduate who learned about career expectations in his university program. Recent graduate participant Cris described his expectations of the job market *“the knowledge that was shared in university was that the 25 year career is over, especially in my program there is a lot of contract work. There are three year contracts that can be renewed...I was prepped for that.”* Other recent graduate participants described a vast disconnect between

expectations and reality for the school to work transition. Recent graduate participant Kim explained *“I didn’t realize I didn’t understand things until I saw them. It was a big blank.”*

Service provider participants described a large disconnect between expectations and reality for recent graduates. Service provider participant Hillary describes the link as *“way off. They are out in the clouds and way off.”* Service provider participant Jenn explains *“sometimes students think they are going to jump into a position way up here when in reality you are going to be starting at the bottom, you are going to be entry level and the pay may not be as high as you are expecting.”* Service provider participant Bill notes:

“they (the expectations) are definitely not aligned. There is an expectation that going to university is going to produce a good job, pay, and benefits. The reality in Sault Ste. Marie is that there are very few opportunities for that type of employment.”

All service providers described a perception that many recent university graduates have unrealistic expectations for the school-to-work transition.

Related to the perceived expectation mismatch expressed by service provider participants, some service providers described conversations with recent graduates about lowering their expectations. Service provider participant Sue shared:

“there are not a lot of positions tailored towards university programming or the types of skills, so these positions are limited. They can’t do what they are trained to do, so they have to find other ways to enter the labour market.”

Service provider participant Julie described an example scenario of providing advice to a recent graduate:

“Say, for example, you get a job as a Sales Associate at Suzy Shier. You are going to go in there and sell well because you have had to set deadlines and goals in your education. You might be working with someone else who doesn’t have an education...but when it is time for a promotion they are going to pick you for the supervisor role because you have the skills. The reality is these are the sorts of jobs that are available. You can’t have high expectations, you have to realize where you are, it might be you meet someone when you go to the bank to do your deposits and they might be looking for a teller...everything is about building blocks and don’t think that anything is below you.”

Recent graduate participants, however, expressed displeasure with the idea of lowering expectations. Recent graduate participant Rachelle described her experience at a local career agency:

“I went to ask how I could find worthwhile gainful employment in town. I was very disappointed because I had my career counsellor tell me I should apply

at McDonalds. They were also advocating that H&M was coming and I should hand in my resume there. I was so disappointed, I did not just spend all this money to work at McDonalds.”

The first subtheme that emerged under the broader theme of expectation clash was racism. Service provider participant Jenn described the difficulty Indigenous graduate have in accessing the labour market locally:

“Anishinaabe students have a difficult time getting positions here in the Sault. They either have to look in their own communities...some of them leave or they end up staying and take whatever jobs they can get so they may end up underemployed. There are certain areas like social work where there are lots of positions...but if you are an Anishinaabemowin graduate where do you go?”

Recent graduate participant Cliff described how racism has impacted his ability to transition successfully to meaningful work:

“The other thing that plays out a lot is your ethnicity and your race. If I had an Italian name, I would be fine in this community and we know that. Am I angry about it? No. It is the community I choose to live in...as a minority person, your job is triple in a community like this, or a Northern Ontario community. If you are minority, even if you accomplish something it is going to take you four times as long.”

The second subtheme that emerged under the broader theme of expectation clash was sense of entitlement. This subtheme emerged only from interviews with service provider participants and not from interviews with recent graduate participants. Many service provider participants felt recent graduates have a sense of entitlement about getting a job with their university degree and that this sense of entitlement negatively impacts upon their school to work transition.

Service provider participant Julie described her belief that this sense of entitlement is related to the way children are parented:

“I don’t think they have any idea in school how tough it is going to be when they get out. So when we tell them, get involved and get experience, they don’t understand how hard it is going to be. They have been spoon fed, we (parents) keep them organized, bring them to playdates, they don’t have lot of time to work out their own lives. So, when all of a sudden we ask them to work out their life, it is a big transition. Parents think they are doing their kids a favour by keeping them in every sport going and music and swimming lessons, but sometimes it is not the greatest because they don’t learn how to make their own fun and their own plans.”

Service provider participant Curtis described his experience with recent university graduates *“I would say the vast majority feel entitled, coming out with a degree, but we also know that a psychology degree, you are not ready to be a*

counsellor, and you likely don't know how to make or organize a client file." Curtis expanded on this by adding *"I think their realities are skewed. They are thinking we need them, can't function without them, and we owe them something."* Similarly, service provider participant Kathryn provided her perspective on entitlement:

"A lot of them want to make money, get a good job...I think when they come out they think once they have that piece of paper they will get a job because they have been cradled through every stage of life. So, they get to the end and they are expected to show some initiative but they have no idea where to start."

Service provider participant Brad shared *"I think the perception is the graduate will come out and have a job, it is going to pay x amount, it is going to be permanent. I have a hard time believing students still have this perception."* Service provider participant Gilbert described his perception on entitlement:

"Sometimes it is an entitlement thing. People think they did four years of university and they've been told if they complete their BA then they will have something ready for them when they get out. If you are stuck in your box thinking you are going to be working in Sault Ste. Marie, in such and such a job, you are going to be set up for failure. You have to widen your scope. You have to understand that no job comes to you, you have to go and get it."

The third subtheme that emerged under the broader theme of expectation clash was tough labour market. Recent graduate and service provider participants recognize Sault Ste. Marie as a challenging labour market and this was also reflected in the data collected from relevant labour market reports. The results illuminate challenges in terms of the community's reliance on a single industry, the proliferation of contract work, the hidden job market, a labour market mismatch, and a lack of available job opportunities.

Service provider participant Jenn described the impact of challenges in Sault Ste. Marie's major industry across the community:

"We are so dependent on one industry that when it is not doing well it puts everything else in a downward spiral. Even the City was late this year with hiring their summer students. When you think of places that might have someone doing office administration they are not taking people on and they may not have as much work as they used to. It is a really rough time."

Service provider participant Jenn described her understanding of opportunities for contract work *"many of them (recent graduates) are getting contract work...I think some might have an idea but for many of them they aren't expecting it, yet it is the reality of the labour market."* The present study found that nine of the 14 participants who were recent graduates were employed in contract work. Recent graduate participant Leo explains:

“The jobs in Sault Ste. Marie are limited with regards to professional jobs. When they are hiring for jobs, they are looking for contracts, so it is difficult to get permanent jobs because people in the labour market are not retiring.”

Recent graduate participants often felt there were a lack of job opportunities. Recent graduate participant Kim described *“there weren’t a lot of job openings for the qualifications I had.”* Service provider participants Brad and Hillary identified the hidden job market as the largest job market locally. Brad shared *“the jobs that are posted, those are the hardest to fill, it is the end of the line where employers go. It might represent 25-30% of available jobs, this percentage is what people who are not networked are competing for.”* Understanding of the hidden job market did not emerge in interviews with recent graduates.

Finally, service provider participants identified a perceived labour market mismatch as contributing to the tough labour market. Service provider participant Martha explained:

“Specialized degree programs such as computer science or engineering or something science related - there is a little niche where you can hone in and get an opportunity that way. But for people like myself who get a Bachelor of Arts or something, you might need to go to graduate school or find your skills in a different work area all together and try and make that work for you.”

Phil expanded on this mismatch to add *“There are not a lot of positions that are tailored towards university programming or the types of skills, so those positions are limited.”* Service provider and recent graduate participants experiences these multiple challenges as contributing to a tough labour market.

The fourth and final subtheme that emerged under the broader theme of expectation clash was fear. This subtheme was unexpected and emerged in interviews with five recent graduates. The researcher found fear to be expressed using a variety of terms including scary, nightmare, anxiety, worried, and sheer depression. The fear generally was expressed in relation to the transition from school-to-work or to the transition from contract to contract as the recent graduate pursued full-time employment. Recent graduate participant Sylvie described the transition as *“a nightmare. The economy was bad in 2009, I put applications out everywhere and I was told I was overqualified.”* Recent graduate participant Cliff describes his feelings as he navigated the school-to-work transition as *“sheer depression. That is where I start. And I don’t think this is something to be shameful about.”* Recent graduate participant Tom referenced fear multiple times in his interview:

“And every day since this job has kind of scared the heck out of me because you don’t really know what is coming and it is so new to me – it is a little bit scary like ‘what if I don’t do this one thing right?’ so it is always on you mind. I

thought transitioning out of school and going to work you would be able to go home at night and not think about it, but that is not the case at all.”

4.4 Theme Four: Networking

The fourth theme that emerged from the data was the importance of networking. The data identified three key aspects of networking that are central to a positive school to work transition in Sault Ste. Marie. These aspects are extracurricular involvement, volunteer activities, and networks. This study differentiates networks from networking by defining networks as preexisting support structures an individual has within the community whereas networking is an active process in which an individual seeks to build support structures and networks through strategic contact with individuals or organizations. This section reports participant views on networking in the Northern Ontario context.

There was general agreement amongst recent graduate and service provider participants that networking eases the school-to-work transition. Recent graduate participant Sophie describes how networking contributed to her successful transition from school-to-work *“one thing is community engagement, networking...whether it was participating in community events, sitting on board, that did a lot.”* Recent graduate Rachelle suggested networking events be more prominent at the university:

“at other universities there are more networking events. I think more networking events where there are specific programs and employers within the

community that can provide you with employment opportunities so you can make these connections while you are still associated with an institution.”

Recent graduate participant Leo suggested *“In Southern Ontario, there is a lot of competition, but in Sault Ste. Marie because of the networking connections I had built it was easier to get some jobs.”*

Some recent graduate participants described networking as a benefit of enrolling in the co-op program. Recent graduate participant Trevor noted *“I think doing the co-op really helped me because I was able to make connections within the community (the Soo).”* Recent graduate participant Shelley suggested networking was how she prepared for the transition *“I think that’s how I was prepared, I had connections in the community, it is all about who you know. They know what I’ve done and they know my name.”*

Recent graduate participants clearly believed networking was important and many suggested the university could facilitate more networking events with local employers.

Service provider participants were strong and unanimous in their belief that networking is the key to a successful labour market transition in Sault Ste. Marie. Service provider participant Hillary described her experience with recent graduate who fail to network successfully:

“I love this topic because it is universal what I see. The kids go to school, even the ones I have hired, honours, great people, great skills, great education,

but they lack the ability or the understanding that in Northern Ontario the key to getting the position is networking. What I find is they get frustrated, they apply and apply and apply, they may get an interview, and they get frustrated and they end up leaving or they end up working in something completely unrelated.”

Service provider participant Martha described networking as *“learning how to network, creating conversations with people, anyone, employers. Take advantage of those STRIVE professional networking events, Take 5s, anything that gets you out networking.”* Some service provider participants questioned the ability of recent graduates to network. Service provider participant Bill suggested *“there is a huge networking skill that is lacking.”* Service provider participant Brad mused:

“we are talking about networking. Networking to me is physical and involves a phone call or setting up a meeting. It is not flipping someone an email or connecting on LinkedIn. That is not a true connection and it is not going to get you hired or even get you on someone’s radar.”

Service provider participant Curtis summed up his thoughts *“it’s about finding connections, don’t disconnect people more than we already are, connect them up.”*

Participants identified extracurricular and volunteer activities as effective ways to build networks while still in university. Recent graduate participants who had participated in extracurricular activities or volunteer activities often reflected on the

networking inherent in these activities as preparing them well for the transition to work. Recent graduate participant Ruth described her involvement *“I was involved in lots of extracurriculars...we did lots of outreach for things like sponsorship...so and so was working here, and then I was able to meet their boss...that was really helpful.”* Service provider participant Jenn described how she encourages students to volunteer as a way to network:

“Students would come see me and I would say, even if you only commit for two to three hours per semester it gives you an opportunity for networking. When you volunteer you find out where there is something coming up and people have an opportunity to see you as a prospective employee.”

Service provider participant Gilbert reinforced *“volunteer work. There are lots of hidden jobs that don’t get posted. You can’t depend on the jobs that are posted, you have to get out there.”*

Networks emerged as a distinct component of the networking theme. For this study, networks are defined as the preexisting support structures an individual has within the community. Recent graduate participants who emerged from university with a strong network tended to have a smooth school-to-work transition. Recent graduate participant Trevor described his transition as *“pretty seamless. I don’t know if it is like that for everybody, probably not, but it was for me. It wasn’t as big of a deal as*

everybody made it out to be." In contrast, recent graduate participant Ruth described her transition as:

"culture shock, and I am still adjusting. I come from a small town and although the population is larger here...I feel it is so much smaller...Algoma is very separate from the community so it is very hard not being from here when the university is very disconnected from the community."

Other participants described the importance of networks in relation to Sault Ste. Marie being a closed community. Service provider participant Brad described it as:

"you need to be able to access that network and if you are not from Sault Ste. Marie that can be a challenge. It is a fairly closed community that way. It is hard to get in to even hear about these opportunities let alone be considered for them."

Many participants expressed sentiments similar to recent graduate participant Cliff that *"Sault Ste. Marie is mostly about who you know."*

The influence of family connections to an individual's network emerged in relation to networks. Service provider participant Curtis described the impact of nepotism to the school-to-work transition *"There is a huge amount of nepotism in the north. Word-of-mouth, nepotism, these are the sorts of things that really affect progress and success."* Having family locally also serves as valuable support function. As service

provider participant Bob explained *“The fact that usually there is family here so there is a support system. This is a huge factor for recent graduates who return to the area.”*

Recent graduate participant Cliff described the importance of family support *“having a wife who supports you makes a big difference.”*

4.5 Theme Five: Soft Skills

The fifth theme that emerged from the data was the importance of soft skills. The data identified a number of soft skills participants felt were essential to successfully navigating the school-to-work transition. These soft skills are reported in descending order with those skills that were referenced most frequently by participants listed first. The soft skills that emerged more than five times include (in descending order): never give up; self-awareness; entrepreneurial thinking; communication skills; ability to make a plan; and, time management. Other soft skills that were described as important by participants but were mentioned less than five times include (in descending order): First Nations perspectives; professional workplace behavior; ability to learn on the job; ability to leverage local connections; coping skills; classroom participation; willingness to learn; confidence; flexibility; and, enthusiasm. This section reports participant views on these soft skills in relation to the school-to-work transition in Sault Ste. Marie.

The soft skill ‘never give up’ was the most frequently mentioned in terms of importance by service provider and graduate participants. ‘Never give up’ reflects the

terminology used by the participants in the interviews and its meaning is essentially the same as the term perseverance. This skill reflects the perception that the school-to-work transition in Sault Ste. Marie is tough and in order to successfully navigate the transition graduates need to understand the results may not be immediate. Service provider participant Hillary described her frustration *“I find they look quickly and then think they have to move away.”* Service provider participant Sue described her experience as a graduate looking for work in Sault Ste. Marie:

“I think graduates don’t value the struggle. I am a recent graduate and when I reflect on what has happened to me over the past six years, it wasn’t easy and I had to make a lot of choices I never imagined I would have to make. You have to embrace the shittiness of it. Then your mind opens and you pick and choose from the opportunities that are out there and eventually you find yourself where you want to be. I think a lot of time the mentality is that you throw your hands up and give up if they can’t find something right away, it is a bail mentality.”

Recent graduate participant Sylvie described her experience *“I didn’t give up and my husband was the only one earning money so I kept going. When it got to a certain point where I wasn’t earning anything I probably would have done Tim Hortons or whatever to get by.”* Service provider Julie compared her personal experience with that of young people today *“I thought I had a hard time finding work when I graduated from*

university, but for these kids it is going to be even harder, nothing is easy to be easy.”

Many recent graduate participants referenced ‘never give up’ when speaking of advice they would offer to other recent graduates. Recent graduate participant Leo recounted his advice to international students:

“I speak to a lot of international students that are graduating and they are not always successful in what they are doing but it is more about perseverance...I suggest they try Sault Ste. Marie even though it is a difficult economy right now.”

Similarly, service provider participants spoke of how they encouraged recent graduates to stay hopeful and keep looking for opportunities.

The second most frequently mentioned soft skill was self-awareness. The importance of this soft skill emerged as a strong theme from service provider participants and some recent graduate participants. Service provider participant Kathryn explained:

“self-awareness is huge. If you are not aware of who you are and what you have to offer, what your skills are and where your weaknesses are, you won’t know how to connect opportunities that would nurture and utilize those natural skills, abilities, and interests.”

Service provider Brenda observed *“to become an entrepreneur, having a work ethic is important but so is being self-aware...knowing what you like and what you don’t like, you have to be self-aware.”* Service provider participant Jenn extended her thoughts on self-awareness to capture how recent graduates articulate their skills:

“students need to be able to articulate what they have...how do you translate learning into a skill? Because it is a skill, it’s not just something we have...we need to show them how to develop it.”

Service provider participants clearly felt self-awareness was critical to a recent graduates’ success in the labour market.

Some recent graduate participants described self-awareness as important to their school-to-work transition. Recent graduate participant Cliff described his program as:

“about the deconstruction and reconstruction of who I am as an individual, and I walked away with all the tools...I was able to make the link between the skills I was developing, but there is no explicit link in university. I came to university with the mindset and I think that is the difference being a mature student.”

Recent graduate participant Adam explained how his first year in the world of work was important to building his self-awareness:

“I learned a lot on the job. That first year I learned a lot about who I was as a person in the workforce which I think I lacked in university because I didn’t participate in co-op and have that practical experience.”

Self-awareness was reported by recent graduate participants as developed in a number of ways, however, for those who spoke about it, the skill was relevant to their school-to-work transition.

The third most frequently mentioned soft skill was entrepreneurial thinking. Recent graduate participants who had successfully navigated the school-to-work transition sometimes describes entrepreneurial approaches they had taken to their job search. Recent graduate participant Rachelle found a youth employment fund brochure and solicited potential employers by highlighting they could get paid \$5,000 to hire her. Similarly recent graduate participant Cris realized she could get paid for the work she was doing as a volunteer and filed a successful application with the Canada Summer Jobs Program. Entrepreneurial approaches to job search emerged from interviews with recent graduate participants.

Service provider participants also recommended entrepreneurial thinking in terms of the job search process. Service provider participant Hillary recommended:

“I introduce them to the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation (NOHFC) internship program. I use it in reverse – instead of waiting for an

organization to post an internship I turn it around and say in which organizations might you qualify for an internship? Then, they do an informal interview with prospective employers and suggest they could manage to get them 50% or 90% of their wages covered for the first year. We teach clients to sell their value...I think it really needs to be stressed in postsecondary, we have given you the basics and now you need to move into an entrepreneurial spirit of selling yourself."

Service provider participants observed there are many entrepreneurship programs available locally, however, some service provider participants questioned the effectiveness of these programs. Service provider Sue suggested:

"We have a lot of youth entrepreneurship programs right now, but a lot of times it will be the same select few students that will apply and will get them. Knowledge and capacity is lacking, they are not taught how to be entrepreneurs. They are handed \$5,000 to start a business but do they know how to write a grant proposal or run a business?"

Service provider participant Bob described his experience with recent graduates interested in becoming entrepreneurs *"a lot of the time they come in and their idea is in the very early stages. They have this great idea and they know what they want to do but they have no idea how to get there."*

Communication skills were the fourth most frequently mentioned soft skill graduates felt was important in order to navigate the school-to-work transition in Sault Ste. Marie. Communication skills mentioned include presentation skills, writing skills, and tone. Recent graduate participants described how presentations required in their university course work helped prepare them for presentations in the workplace. Adam described his experience *“My classroom experience prepared me for my career goal. Coming out of high school I was very uncomfortable with presentations, but at Algoma University, especially with the small classes, presentations were a big part of it and that made me more comfortable so that helped.”* Likewise recent graduate participant Trevor indicated *“public speaking for sure, because once you get into the upper years you have to talk in front of the class even if you are the quiet kid who wants to stay at the back of the room.”* Recent graduate participants reported communication skills as an area they had developed mainly through their university education.

Service provider participants, on the other hand, generally perceived communication skills of recent graduates to be poor. Service provider participant Sue described communication skills as *“lacking in the graduates.”* Service provider Julie attributed this deficiency to technology:

“Kids now are so used to technology and not to communicating, that all of a sudden to be expected to communicate and express themselves, it is painful. I watch in the mock interviews...I used to do one but now I do them twice as I felt

there was a need. You used to spend hours on the phone, for example, it is very different now.”

Service provider participant Bill suggested *“these skills (soft skills) are not skills students are learning in university. They don’t even know how to write an email properly.”* Service provider and recent graduate participants agreed communication skills were important but offered different understandings of the competency of recent graduates in this area.

The ability to make a plan emerged as the fifth most common soft skill mentioned in the interviews. This theme emerged primarily from service provider participants and from one recent graduate participant. Service provider participants saw a need for university students to make a plan early on in their studies. Service provider participant Julie described how she encourages students to make a plan while still in university:

“I think the best thing a student can do is get involved right from the start when they first come to university. I developed a presentation for academic orientation, it is called ‘make a plan’. What I am trying to do is tell them to make a plan, your plan can change all the time, but have some idea what you want to do...that is what I’m giving them on their way in and we’re hoping this will help them.”

Service provider participant Martha had a similar opinion *“and not waiting until the final year. It needs to happen in year one and all along the way.”* Service provider participant Phil recommended an approach where students begin to make a plan even before they get to university:

“And learning about it from the very beginning, before you even go in. You need to work backwards...I know it’s hard for them to decide what they want to do for the rest of your life, however, you need to be thinking that way in some aspect to be able to plan the career from the outset. Don’t wait until you’re done that four year degree in biology and then decide what you are going to do. If there was something within university programming to get them to discover these goals earlier.”

The sixth most frequently mentioned soft skill was time management. Multiple recent graduate participants referenced how their university education, and in some cases, their work experience, helped them develop strong time management skills that were useful in the school-to-work transition. Recent graduate Trevor described *“it is the small things like being able to manage your time, calendars, knowing you have a midterm one day and the assignment due the day before. If you leave it to the last minute you won’t be able to physically get it done.”* Recent graduate participant Kim echoed this sentiment *“I think time management, the biggest thing is being responsible. You can’t miss work no matter where you are. When you have a salaried job and you are*

responsible for something, taking that seriously is a big thing.” Recent graduate participant Tom described how he learned time management skills in his final year of university *“I was at school and placement for 12 hours a day a lot. There is something to be said for really getting down to it. You obviously need to complain about it, but it was totally worth it.”* Multiple participants who were recent graduates felt the university experience helped to develop time management skills.

The remainder of the soft skills mentioned by participants in the interviews emerged less than four times in total. These skills include: First Nations perspectives; professional workplace behavior; ability to learn on the job; ability to leverage local connections; coping skills; classroom participation; willingness to learn; confidence; flexibility; and, enthusiasm. Recent graduate participant Adam explained how he gained First Nation perspectives as an Algoma University student:

“I gained a fresher perspective on First Nation issues...from a broader national perspective, we learned about treaties and certain cultures. I didn’t know a thing about residential schools until I came here. Coming to Algoma University definitely helped me in that respect, working anywhere in Canada that is relevant. Whether I work in public service or anywhere it is important to have that open mind and that First Nation perspective.”

Other examples of participant views on soft skills emerged from a combination of service provider and recent graduate participants. Service provider participant Curtis

felt recent graduates need better coping skills *“I find their coping skills for a backup minus technology are next to zero. They are not innovative like that – they are willing to learn but they don’t know what to do.”* Recent graduate participant Rachelle reinforced the importance of being willing to learn:

“when you are in a transition from education to work you are learning, so you can’t go into a position thinking you don’t have anything to gain. It is two ways – you are giving something in return but as an entry level employee you are gaining so much more than you are giving.”

Though these soft skills emerged less often, they were important to the participants’ experiences.

4.6 Summary of Research Findings

Five major themes emerged from this study: (a) preparation in curriculum; (b) work experience; (c) expectation clash; (d) networking; and, (e) soft skills. Two of the themes contained subthemes. The theme of work experience contained four subthemes: (i) internships; (ii) a desire for more hands on learning; (iii) a desire for more practical experience; and, (iv) technical skill development. The theme of expectation clash contained four subthemes: (i) racism; (ii) sense of entitlement; (iii) tough labour market; and, (iv) fear. The findings of this study report participant views relating to each of the themes and subthemes identified.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the results of the study. This discussion is organized by examining the results as they relate to each of the three research questions identified in Chapter One.

5.1 Research Question One:

How do Algoma University graduates seeking to enter the Sault Ste. Marie labour market experience the school-to-work transition?

The present study demonstrated multiple common themes related to the school-to-work transition experience for university graduates. The findings (a) demonstrate graduates believe the university has a role in preparing students for work inside the curriculum; (b) demonstrate the importance of work experience; (c) examine the importance of factors that influence the expectations of university graduates for the school-to-work transition; and, (d) expose the important role of networking and networks to the transition experience. This section elaborates on these findings and relates them to the academic literature on the topic.

Algoma University graduates, without exception, believe university education has a role to play in preparing students for the world of work. However, regardless of this belief, graduates were unlikely to have accessed co-curricular supports to prepare them for the school-to-work transition during their time in university. Many were

unaware these services even existed. Instead, graduates were likely to access career placement services from community service providers after graduation and once they were actively looking for work. At the same time, recent graduates reported activities within the curriculum as having had the most positive impact on their school-to-work transition. These activities included community placements, co-op programming, and the Northern Ontario business case competition. Furthermore, the positive influence of faculty on the school-to-work transition was notable and extended from simple acts such as forwarding job opportunities to students to providing more in-depth career advice or being able to learn directly from faculty who are active practitioners.

These findings support the literature recommending embedding career preparedness into the academic curriculum. This recommendation emerged as early as 1996 from a large-scale study of 21 liberal-arts colleges in the United States asking graduates to report how connected their academic experience was to their careers (Lunney et al., 1996). Lunney et al (1996) found that, a year into their work experience, graduates reported a decline in how much they perceived their academic experience to be related to their careers. Algoma University graduates had comparable opinions, with multiple participants reporting they felt well-prepared for graduate school but not as prepared for the world of work.

Similar to the findings of Litoui & Oproiu (2012) in Romanian universities, Algoma University graduates acknowledge they need assistance but are not accessing career

resources within the co-curricular support structures of the university. Similarly, a study on the school-to-work transition in the United States was surprised to find that university resources were not mentioned as important considerations for students in navigating the school-to-work transition, even though students reported finding a career as a primary concern (Yazedjian, Kielaszek, & Toews, 2010). The present study also found that few graduates reported having sought assistance for co-curricular supports, and many were not aware of the existence of supports at Algoma University.

The findings imply institutions need to build work experience preparation into the academic program requirements and further integrate co-curricular supports into the academic realm of the institution. Nelson and Kift (2005) describe a transition pedagogy that scaffolds learning throughout all years of study guided by a philosophy of student engagement that supports experiences and assessments that mirror real life situations. Watts (2006) suggests several methods to support the increased integration of career preparedness into the curriculum, including inserting career development learning modules into courses and developing a bank of evidence students can use to present themselves to employers in the future. Furthermore, a deeper attention on employability can be achieved by increasing the number of high impact practices in the curriculum, including collaborative group projects, internships, and service learning (Arrowsmith et al., 2011). The findings of this study point to a need for Algoma

University to further explore a variety of methods to incorporate career preparedness into the academic fabric of the institution.

This study reinforces the findings of the 2007 study by Wood and Kaczynski that found graduates who completed a structured work experience program felt well prepared for work while graduates of a standard Mathematics program felt unprepared. Algoma University graduates tended to feel well-prepared for graduate school but less than prepared for the world of work, with the exception of those who participated in activities linked to career preparedness that were integrated into the curriculum of their programs. Recent graduates who reported experiences that positively impacted their school-to-work transition and were integrated directly into their academic programs tended to be in programs grouped by the researcher as 'Professional' and included Business Administration, and Community Economic and Social Development. These program contain experiences such as unpaid placements (service learning) and group projects that simulate authentic experiences graduates will encounter in the world of work.

Lindburg (2009) found graduates of the post-secondary system in the United Kingdom are likely to experience a lot of job-to-job mobility in their early careers as they build professional skills and experience. This study found 64% of recent graduate participants were employed in contract work that they hoped would give them the experience needed to move on to permanent positions. In this aspect, the school-to-

work transition experience for university graduates in Sault Ste. Marie seems to be similar to the experience in the United Kingdom where university graduates build their skills and experience through on-the-job training and regular movement through jobs.

The present study found work experience to be a significant contributor to a positive school-to-work transition. Regardless of how work experience was obtained, recent graduates consistently reported that having work experience helped them to successfully navigate the school-to-work transition. Likewise, service providers believed work experience was important. Lunney et al. (1996) found university graduates of liberal arts programming in the United States reported perceived deficiencies in computer skills, being flexible in job requirements, and having general knowledge of how the world operates. These sorts of non-subject specific competencies are often developed on the job. A more recent study by Shayeb (2013) in the United Arab Emirates identified a disconnect between graduate and employer expectations in which employers were more likely than graduates to value interpersonal skills such as communication skills, the ability to work under pressure, and self-confidence. The Shayeb study is another demonstration of the importance of generic, non-subject specific competencies that work experience helps to develop. There is a need to address practical, non-subject specific competencies across all university program areas, including liberal arts.

Many recent graduate participants expressed a desire for more hands-on and practical experience as part of their university education. A report produced by the Algoma Workforce Investment Corporation in September 2016 found that of 161 local job postings, 97% indicated that experience was necessary. No academic literature exists related to the impact of work experience specifically in the Northern Ontario context, however, this study identified a positive impact for students who are able to acquire work experience prior to completion of their university studies.

The present study identified several strengths and associated barriers to internship programs that are intended to help recent graduates gain work experience in Northern Ontario. Though no academic literature exists on the subject of internship programs that are specific to Northern Ontario, this study suggests internship programs are valuable to some degree in terms of helping recent graduates gain work experience. There are, however, particular groups including mature students and graduates who are not permanent Canadian residents who are excluded from participating in the programs by the program eligibility requirements. Several participants saw the internship programs as more beneficial to local organizations that are receiving funding for a large proportion of an employees' wages rather than to the intern who is supposed to be learning new skills and gaining experience in a field related to their field of study. No participants in the study indicated that their internship had resulted in a full-time

position at the end of the year-long program though some were able to use the work experience gained through the internship to jump into other contract work.

The present study identified a clash in expectations for recent graduates as well as several factors that influence the expectations of university graduates for the school-to-work transition. Most recent graduates who participated in the study expected to be able to transition smoothly to the world of work upon graduation. A link between attitude and expectation in the school-to-work transition has been uncovered in the literature (Tomina & Sorana, 2012; Zorver & Owen, 2014). Zorver and Owen (2014) found a positive relationship between optimism and the ability to plan for a future career, get and keep a job, and self-efficacy. Recent Algoma University graduates reflected on their optimism when they entered university based on expectations from secondary school that a university education is key to future success. Many graduates who are either unemployed or still getting by on contract work expressed increased levels of frustration now that their university degrees are not resulting in a stable, full-time position as they had hoped.

Meanwhile, service providers expressed frustration that a university education is not resulting in the skills and knowledge local employers need. This expectation clash mirrors the findings of a Vietnamese study. Tran (2013) found that employers in Vietnam are having difficulty finding graduates with the skills they require while graduates are presented with conflicting expectations around the development of soft

skills. The Tran (2013) study reinforced the development of realistic expectations. This finding was reflected in the present study. Recent graduate participants who had been taught during their university studies about what to expect in the Northern Ontario labour market had an easier time transitioning into it, even if the expectation was that things would be difficult. Graduate participants who learned from faculty that the 25 year career is over and to prepare for contract work were better prepared in terms of expectations for the transition. Moreover, the present study unearthed a mismatch between the service providers' expectations of what is realistic and recent graduates' unwillingness to lower expectations. In Sault Ste. Marie, bridging this expectation gap is particularly crucial to stemming youth outmigration by aligning northern post-secondary education with northern realities. As suggested by David Robinson (2013) perhaps the education system is failing young people in the north by preparing them to leave the region. Misaligned expectations could be a contributing factor.

Further to a general expectation clash, this study identified several subthemes that impact expectations. The first is racism. While this subtheme emerged from only three participant interviews, the researcher observed accounts from other recent graduates who had experienced racism at the Anishinaabe alumni panel event she attended during the research period. A literature review on the school-to-work transition for Indigenous students in Australia identified lack of cross-cultural awareness and training by employers as one of several barriers to the school-to-work transition for

Indigenous graduates (Long, Frigo, & Batten, 1998). Racism is a noteworthy barrier for some Algoma University graduates to finding work in Sault Ste. Marie, however, the present study found this barrier was only identified by those who had been impacted by or directly exposed to racism.

The second subtheme that emerged impacting expectations was sense of entitlement. This finding was interesting in that it emerged from service providers but not from recent graduates. A 2010 study that surveyed 23,413 Millennial undergraduate university students from across Canada found that Millennials had realistic expectations of their first jobs and salary with 71% reporting they would accept a less than ideal job as a career starter (Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2010). Based on a review of popular media, Ng, Schweitzer, and Lyons (2010) had expected Millennials to exhibit a sense of entitlement with respect to their first jobs but instead found Millennials to exhibit realistic expectations. It is unclear if the perceived sense of entitlement identified by service providers in this study is partly due to the influence of popular media or preconceived notions.

The third subtheme impacting expectations is the widespread belief that Sault Ste. Marie is a tough labour market. The most recent Local Labour Market Planning Report (2016) for the Algoma region identifies several challenges. Labour market growth has not been spread evenly across sectors. The administrative and support sector has grown due to increased employment in call centres rather than professional-type

positions requiring a university education (Algoma Workforce Investment Corporation, 2016). Overall, employment in Sault Ste. Marie has dipped in the past two years and remains below 35% as of July 2016, compared to the average of 37% for the past decade (Algoma Workforce Investment Corporation, 2016). The expectation of entering a tough labour market is further exacerbated by major local employers announcing layoffs and being placed under bankruptcy protection in the past several years.

For university graduates, it is important to maintain optimism and hope regardless of the challenges. A positive attitude towards job prospects has been shown to be associated with the ability to get and keep a job (Zorver & Owen, 2014). And there is reason to hope in Sault Ste. Marie. First, service providers in the present study identified a large hidden job market and consider building skills to support graduates accessing this hidden job market as an important part of their work. Furthermore, the realities of the Sault Ste. Marie labour market present opportunity for Algoma University graduates.

Understanding these realities can translate into hope. An aging population translates to an aging workforce, meaning there will be more job opportunities in the future to fill gaps in the workforce due to retirements (Algoma Workforce Investment Corporation, 2016). Soft skills are what employers are looking for, and these can be developed in university. In a comprehensive survey of large employers in the Algoma region conducted in 2015/16, employers cited they are looking for “qualities that

embody the personal characteristics of the work and not necessarily the technical skills.” (Algoma Workforce Investment Corporation, 2016, p. 13). These are only some factors that may foster optimism in recent graduates.

The final subtheme around expectations was fear. This subtheme was unexpected but not surprising given the critical importance of a successful transition to work for an individual’s future prospects. Overcoming fear is a key consideration for supporting the school-to-work transition. Pinquart, Juang, and Silbereisen (2003) reference the work of Bandura (1986; 1997) and Saks (1995) in their study on self-efficacy and the school-to-work transition, pointing out that individuals with high-self-efficacy report less stress because they are able to overcome barriers, cope well with difficulties, and perceive the process as more of a challenge than a threat. Yazedjian, Kielaszek, and Toews (2014) surveyed 183 final year students’ perceptions about their upcoming transition from school-to-work in the United States and found students had mixed feelings, with some reporting they were ‘scared’ and other described a ‘fear of the unknown’. The present study reflects findings elsewhere in the literature that fear can be one of many feelings present during this important transition time.

The present study exposed the importance of networking and networks to a successful transition to work in Sault Ste. Marie. Many participants found networking to be the most helpful aspect of work, volunteer, or extracurricular experience gained during their university experience. A 2015 dissertation by Baay examining the school-to-

work transition in the Netherlands found social relations to be helpful to the job search process. Baay found that knowing a higher number of people in certain professions was positively related to a high number of job offers and better type of contract after graduation (Baay, 2015). Through the lens of recent graduates and service providers, a similar dynamic exists in Sault Ste. Marie. The results of this study suggest that facilitating connections between students and local employers could ease the school-to-work transition for Algoma University graduates. In particular, connections facilitated by the university could help equalize the perceived imbalance of opportunity present for those who do not have existing networks in the community.

In summary, Algoma University graduates experience the school-to-work transition in a diverse and varied manner. This study revealed transition is impacted by a number of factors and these findings can inform institutions and individuals seeking to ease the transition. First, graduates believe the university has a role in preparing them for the world of work and this role extends to the academic domain. The incorporation of career preparedness into the university curriculum has been shown to positively contribute to the school-to-work transition. Second, work experience is key to the transition and opportunities for more hands-on and practical experience as part of a university education are desired by graduates. Third, graduates with realistic expectations, optimism, and hope have an easier school-to-work transition as they are prepared for the difficult Sault Ste. Marie labour market. Racism and fear are challenges

some university graduates are faced with as they navigate the transition. Finally, the study revealed the importance of networking and networks for university graduates in Sault Ste. Marie.

5.2 Research Question Two:

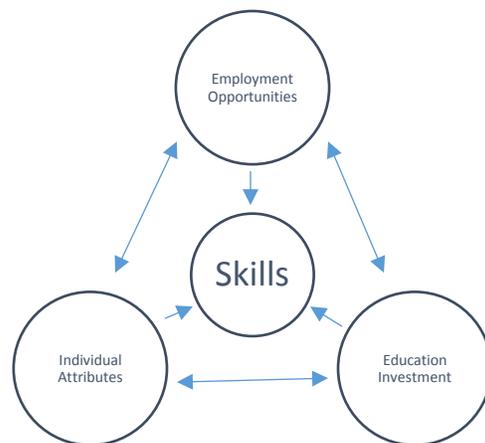
How do university graduates and those supporting the school-to-work transition in Sault Ste. Marie understand the impact of the hidden features and nuances of the Northern Ontario culture and labour market?

The present study identified two aspects of the school-to-work transition that are reflective of the Sault Ste. Marie culture and labour market: expectations and networking. However, these aspects are likely present in communities elsewhere and should not be considered unique to Sault Ste. Marie.

In terms of expectations, the realities of the Sault Ste. Marie labour market are difficult. Moreover, due to the lack of economic diversification locally, the types of positions available for university graduates are limited. This has resulted in a perceived labour market mismatch and a negative view of job opportunities post-graduation. This expectation clash is potentially contributing to youth outmigration and underemployment for university graduates. Furthermore, the most frequently mentioned soft skill essential in the Sault Ste. Marie labour market was ‘never give up’, perhaps reflecting the persistence needed to find work in a difficult labour market.

New Zealand has found itself in a similar situation for the past two decades as many youth struggled with the transition from school-to-work while employers were describing regional skills shortages (Dalziel, 2015). Dalziel (2015) proposed the development of a regional skills ecosystem that brings together employer and industry engagement, student engagement, and organization engagement to fill skill gaps in a regional labour force in a way that benefits all partners. Dalziel (2015) described a model that combines the tenants of human capital theory with the matching of individual abilities to employment opportunities that applies well to the Sault Ste. Marie context (Figure 1 below). This model recognizes human capital alone does not equal success in the labour market and may be a helpful way to think about the expectation disconnect for university graduates in Sault Ste. Marie.

Figure 1: A Model for Skill Formation



Source: Dalziel (2015)

Networking is an aspect of the school-to-work transition that is relevant regardless of geographical location. However, this study identified its central

importance to the school-to-work transition in Sault Ste. Marie. Furthermore, this study identified the idea of Sault Ste. Marie as a 'closed community' in which it is more difficult for newcomers to the community or those with no preexisting networks to enter the labour market if they do not have previously existing connections. The importance of networks and networking could be related to the culture of Sault Ste. Marie, although it is likely there are other small communities in which graduates have similar experiences. This research suggests facilitating networking is an important part of a university's role in preparing graduates for the school-to-work transition. This research revealed several examples of university-facilitated networking opportunities yet also identified the university could be doing more in this regard.

5.3 Research Question Three:

How has university education prepared graduates for the school-to-work transition?

Which skills, knowledge, and values have been most valuable in supporting the transition, and in what way? What student support services have been most helpful in the school-to-work transition?

This research demonstrated university education has prepared graduates for some aspects of the school-to-work transition. However, it also revealed areas where the university could do more. As previously discussed, graduates who had participated in a structured work experience (e.g., placement, co-op, case competition) as part of their university education benefitted from this experience. Likewise, graduates who had

been taught by faculty who were practitioners in the field were better prepared for the school to work transition. Professional programs such as Business Administration and Community Economic and Social Development are preparing their graduates well in this regard.

This study identified several ideas for improving the ways in which Algoma University prepares graduates for the school-to-work transition. These ideas include incorporating career preparedness directly into the curriculum, expanding work-integrated and hands-on learning opportunities, and explicitly addressing practical experience and technical skill development in the curriculum. In addition, in order to better prepare graduates for the school-to-work transition, Algoma University must address the expectation clash for university graduates. The Dalziel (2015) study is informative in this regard as it speaks to the linkage between employer and industry engagement, student engagement, and organization engagement. The results of this study suggest that better integration of community service provider knowledge into university and curriculum planning could help bridge the expectation gap. Small steps have occurred in this regard, but larger scale efforts are needed. Finally, this study identified networking and networks as important to graduate success. This finding implies a responsibility on the part of Algoma University to facilitate network development as part of the undergraduate learning experience.

The present study identified numerous skills that help facilitate the school-to-work transition for university graduates. It is illuminating to find that none of the skills identified were discipline-specific in nature. The findings align with those of a large scale survey of employers in the Algoma region in which the top five skills sought by employers were the following non-technical soft skills: customer service skills; communication skills; self-motivated/ability to work with little or no supervision; teamwork/interpersonal skills; and, problem solving/reasoning/creativity (Algoma Workforce Investment Corporation, 2016). This study reinforces the development of soft skills is critical to a smooth school-to-work transition.

As might be expected based on studies such as Tran (2013) and Shayeb (2013), there was a mismatch in some areas between how graduates describe their competencies and how service providers perceive them. Recent graduates, for example, felt their communication skills were well-developed in university while service providers felt communication skills were generally lacking in university graduates. The top three skills identified as helpful to the school-to-work transition were 'never give up', self-awareness, and entrepreneurial thinking. There is no literature to support persistence and entrepreneurial thinking as skills that are linked to a successful transition, however, they appear to be relevant in Sault Ste. Marie. The soft skill of self-awareness is supported in the literature by Daniels and Brooker (2014). Daniels and Brooker (2014) suggest paying more attention to student identity development as it is identity

development that will help graduates operationalize graduate attributes in the workplace. The soft skills identified in this study provide a foundation to gauge what works to support the school-to-work transition in Sault Ste. Marie.

This study revealed students are unlikely to utilize co-curricular support services during their studies in order to prepare for the school-to-work transition. This finding reinforces the importance of building career preparedness into the core curriculum of all university programs in order to meet student needs.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS

This chapter discusses the conclusions of the study. This conclusion provides a summary conclusion, research limitations, researcher reflections, and recommendations for future research.

6.1 Summary Conclusion

The aim of this research was to explore the school-to-work transition of Algoma University graduates in Sault Ste. Marie. The objective of the research was met as the present study provides an in-depth understanding of the school-to-work transition from the perspective of recent graduates and service providers who are immersed in the realities of supporting the transition. This rich description of the school-to-work transition process in Northern Ontario uses a constructivist lens to illuminate the lived experience of Algoma University graduates. The present study provides a better understanding of the school-to-work transition experience that has the potential to inform program and policy development at Algoma University and in the wider Sault Ste. Marie community. Ultimately, it is the researcher's hope this work can contribute to the development of a highly skilled workforce and regional economic development in Northern Ontario.

This research uncovered many different ways in which Algoma University graduates experience the transition from school-to-work. The findings demonstrate that

even though individual experiences differ, graduates believe a) the university has a role in preparing students for work inside the curriculum; b) work experience is important; c) expectations influence the transition experience; and, d) networking and networks are critical to the transition in Sault Ste. Marie. Recommendations for Algoma University to improve the school-to-work transition include:

- incorporating career preparedness directly into the curriculum;
- expanding work-integrated and hands-on learning opportunities;
- explicitly addressing practical and technical skills development in the curriculum; and,
- taking action to reduce the expectation clash.

Dalziel's model (2015) linking employer, student, and organization engagement is a powerful one for this study. This research uncovered disconnect between the work of the university and community service providers in terms of their roles in transitioning recent graduates. One way to move forward with these recommendations is to create a forum where service providers, university stakeholders, and recent graduates can come together to discuss specific actions and build connections. Some methods that have been successful elsewhere include the use of Program Advisory Committees with membership from employers and the development of networks comprised of past students now employed in the region (Arrowsmith et al., 2011). Given the shared objectives of graduate success and regional development, a logical recommendation

flowing out of this research is to work on linkages between employers, service providers, students, and Algoma University.

This research fits into the broader post-secondary system context in a number of ways. The present study demonstrates support for recent policy directives around experiential learning by illustrating the importance of embedding career preparedness and practical hands-on learning directly into the academic curriculum. Furthermore, this study reinforces the recommendation of the Premier's Highly Skilled Workforce Expert Panel (2016) to enhance access to labour market data for developing education and training programs. This research demonstrates the importance of collaborative and coordinated action by post-secondary institutions, service providers, and policy makers in Northern Ontario to work together towards the shared objective of more seamless transitions from school to work.

6.2 Research Limitations

This particular study was an exploratory case study. The primary limitation of the research is its lack of generalizability. This case study examined only Algoma University graduates in Sault Ste. Marie, and within the population identified, the researcher conducted interviews with only 27 participants. The results cannot be generalized to all Algoma University graduates nor can the results be generalized as representative of other small communities across Northern Ontario.

This particular study is limited by the breakdown of participants who were interviewed. The original intent of the researcher was to focus on the views of participants who were recent graduates. However, it was more difficult than expected to recruit participants and the breakdown of the 27 participants ended up being 14 participants who were recent graduates and 13 who were service providers. This may have resulted in research results that were evenly distributed between the two groups and less focused on seeing the transition through the eyes of the recent graduates. Furthermore, the maximal variation sampling was difficult to conduct at a practical level as participation was primarily based on locating willing participants. As a result, the breakdown of characteristics (gender, age range, employment status, program, and self-identification status) were not as evenly distributed as originally intended.

There are limitations associated with the specific method of data collection. Using interviews as the primary method of data collection has limitations. The data has the potential to be deceptive by including only information the participant wants the researcher to hear (Creswell, 2008). The researcher acknowledges this limitation may be exacerbated given the small size of the community in which the research was conducted.

6.3 Researcher Reflexivity

The researcher is actively engaged as a member of administration for Algoma University in Sault Ste. Marie. In addition, the researcher has herself transitioned to the

Sault Ste. Marie labour market and found the transition difficult. Given the researcher's knowledge and involvement in the field, as well as her personal experience, there was a need for the researcher to be mindful of potential bias that could emerge in the interview process and in the writing of this report. In order to minimize bias, the researcher was careful in the interviews not to articulate any preconceived notions she had about the topics being discussed. She was also careful to limit the sharing of personal stories and experiences with research participants. Regardless, the researcher is mindful that some participants, particularly those employed by Algoma University, may have been influenced by her role as a member of university administration.

Consistent with Charmaz (2006), the researcher recognized it as her responsibility to be reflexive about preconceived ideas she brought to the research. The researcher kept a journal throughout the research in which she was careful to differentiate her own personal reflections and assumptions from phenomena she was observing directly. Only direct observations were included in *Dedoose* and included as part of the data analysis. Reflexivity is increasingly used to assess quality of qualitative research and was used in this study to explicitly acknowledge the researcher's influence on the research (Gentles et al., 2014).

6.4 Recommendations for Future Research

Future research could focus on several areas. Exploration of quantitative career outcomes for graduates across Northern Ontario broken down by the maximal variation

sampling characteristics used in the present study would be interesting and would illuminate if there are variations across communities or if Northern Ontario shares common characteristics. A number of the themes identified in the present study could be further explored in greater depth in a Northern Ontario context. For example, the effects of particular types of work experience on the school-to-work transition or the impacts of racism on the school-to-work transition. Finally, future research could attempt to develop a model such as the one proposed by Dalziel (2015) to serve as a best practice model for university/community/student engagement in preparing for the school-to-work transition in Northern Ontario.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Approval from Memorial University's Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research



ICEHR Number:	20162692-ED
Approval Period:	April 13, 2016 – April 30, 2017
Funding Source:	N/A
Responsible Faculty:	Dr. Vernon Curran Faculty of Medicine
Title of Project:	<i>An Exploration of the School-to-Work Transitions of University Graduates in Northern Ontario</i>

April 13, 2016

Ms. Dawn Elmore
Faculty of Education
Memorial University of Newfoundland

Dear Ms. Elmore:

Thank you for your correspondence of April 6, 2016 addressing the issues raised by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) concerning the above-named research project.

The ICEHR has re-examined the proposal with the clarification and revisions submitted, and is satisfied that the concerns raised by the Committee have been adequately addressed. In accordance with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2)*, the project has been granted *full ethics clearance to April 30, 2017*. ICEHR approval applies to the ethical acceptability of the research, as per Article 6.3 of the *TCPS2*. Researchers are responsible for adherence to any other relevant University policies and/or funded or non-funded agreements that may be associated with the project.

If you need to make changes during the course of the project, which may raise ethical concerns, please submit an amendment request, with a description of these changes, via your Researcher Portal account for the Committee's consideration.

Additionally, the *TCPS2* requires that you submit an annual update to the ICEHR before April 30, 2017 to request renewal of your clearance, if you plan to continue the project, or closure when the project no longer requires contact with human participants, is completed and/or terminated.

Annual updates and amendment requests can be submitted from your Researcher Portal account by clicking the *Applications (Submitted – Post Review)* quick link on your Portal homepage.

We wish you success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Kelly Blidook, Ph.D.
Vice-Chair, Interdisciplinary Committee on
Ethics in Human Research

KB/lw

cc: Supervisor – Dr. Vernon Curran, Faculty of Medicine
Associate Dean, Graduate Programs, Faculty of Education

Appendix B: Approval from Algoma University's Research Ethics Board



ALGOMA UNIVERSITY
ETHICS COMMITTEE CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

CERTIFICATE #
2016_DE_108

This is to certify that:

Project Title:

An Exploration of the School-to-Work Transition of University Graduates in Northern Ontario

Principal Researcher:

Dawn Elmore, Memorial University

Co-Investigators:

N/A

has been considered by the Ethics Committee and is APPROVED

Approval date: 19th April 2016

Expiry date: 18th April 2017

It is the Principal Researcher's responsibility to ensure that all researchers associated with this project are aware of the conditions of approval and which documents have been approved.

The Principal Researcher is required to notify the Chair of the Ethics Committee, via amendment or progress report, of

- Any significant change to the project and the reason for that change, including an indication of ethical implications (if any);
- Serious adverse effects on participants and the action taken to address those effects;
- Any other unforeseen events or unexpected developments that merit notification;
- Any change in Principal Researcher;
- Any expiry of the insurance coverage provided with respect to sponsored clinical trials and proof of re-insurance;
- A delay of more than 12 months in the commencement of the project; and,
- Termination or closure of the project.

Additionally, the Principal Researcher is required to submit

- A Request for Extension of the project prior to the expiry date, if applicable; (*forms to be provided*); and
- A detailed Final Report at the conclusion of the project.

The Ethics Committee may conduct an audit at any time.

All research subject to Ethics Committee Review must be conducted in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement 2: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (2010).

• **SIGNED:**

(REB Chair)

DATE: 19th April 2016

Please quote CERTIFICATE # in all correspondence

Appendix C: Sample email invitation to recent Algoma University graduate participants

Algoma University Alumni,

DID YOU GET A JOB IN NORTHERN ONTARIO AFTER GRADUATION? HAVE YOU GRADUATED AND ARE LOOKING FOR WORK IN SAULT STE. MARIE? ARE YOU WILLING TO SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCES?

I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at Memorial University exploring the school-to-work transitions of university graduates in Northern Ontario. The purpose of my research is to explore the experiences of Algoma University graduates who have entered or are attempting to enter the Sault Ste. Marie labour market in order to better understand the school-to-work transition in a Northern Ontario context.

I am looking for participants who have graduated from an undergraduate program at Algoma University in the past 10 years and are willing to share their experiences transitioning from school-to-work. Participants will complete a 20-30 minute interview in a private setting with the researcher and the researcher may contact you in the future to ask follow-up questions or request another interview. Participants must not have completed graduate studies. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any time without penalty up until the data analysis begins on July 31, 2016.

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. It has also been approved by Algoma University's Research Ethics Board (REB). If you have ethical concerns about the research, such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

The primary benefit of the research is to provide insight to policy makers, post-secondary institutions, and employers on the school-to-work transition from the perspective of those who are experiencing and supporting the transition. If you are interested, please contact Dawn Elmore at dawn.elmore@algomau.ca or 705-949-2301 ext. 4372 to arrange an interview time.

Appendix D: Sample email invitation to service provider participants

I am writing to see if you might be interested in participating in a 20-30 minute interview as part of a research project. I am currently completing my thesis work for my M.Ed. at Memorial University, and am doing my research on exploring the school-to-work transitions of Algoma University graduates in northern Ontario. Most of my research is based on interviews with graduates from the past ten years, however, I am also looking for participants who support the school-to-work transition.

Participation is entirely voluntary and individuals have the right to withdraw at any time without penalty up until the data analysis begins on July 31, 2016. Also, please note that Algoma University is not involved in the study, and participation is not a requirement of employment.

The primary benefit of the research is to provide insight to policy makers, post-secondary institutions, and employers on the school-to-work transition from the perspective of those who are experiencing and supporting the transition. Upon completion of the research project, you will be invited to a public presentation and also receive a final research report that summarizes the findings.

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. It has also been approved by Algoma University's Research Ethics Board (REB). If you have ethical concerns about the research, such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

Let me know if you are interested.

Thanks for considering,

Appendix E: Informed Consent Form and Information Sheet



Faculty of Education

St. John's, NL, Canada A1B 3V6
Tel: 709-864-8260 Fax: 709-864-2337 www.mun.ca

Informed Consent Form

Title: An Exploration of the School-to-Work Transitions of University Graduates in Northern Ontario

Researcher(s): Dawn Elmore, Graduate Student, Faculty of Education, Memorial University, dawn.elmore@algonau.ca or 705-949-2301 ext. 4372

Supervisor(s): Dr. Vernon Curran, Faculty of Education, Memorial University, vcurran@mun.ca or 709-777-7542

You are invited to take part in a research project entitled “An Exploration of the School-to-Work Transitions of University Graduates in Northern Ontario.”

This form is part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. It also describes your right to withdraw from the study. In order to decide whether you wish to participate in this research study, you should understand enough about its risks and benefits to be able to make an informed decision. This is the informed consent process. Take time to read this carefully and to understand the information given to you. Please contact the researcher, Dawn Elmore, if you have any questions about the study or for more information not included here before you consent.

It is entirely up to you to decide whether to take part in this research. If you choose not to take part in this research or if you decide to withdraw from the research once it has started, there will be no negative consequences for you, now or in the future. Some participants may be employed by Algoma University and as such, should know that Algoma University is not involved in the study and participation is not a requirement of employment.

Introduction and Purpose

I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at Memorial University under the supervision of Dr. Vernon Curran. As part of my Masters thesis, I am exploring the school-to-work transitions of university graduates in Northern Ontario. The purpose of my research is to explore the experiences of Algoma University graduates who have entered or are attempting to enter the Sault Ste. Marie labour market in order to better understand the school-to-work transition in a Northern Ontario context.

The primary benefit of the research is to provide insight to policy makers, post-secondary institutions, and employers on the school-to-work transition from the perspective of those who are experiencing and supporting the transition. This insight may in turn influence the development and delivery of labour market policy and programs, as well as post-secondary programming (both academic and co-curricular). In addition, this research may help universities understand which knowledge, skills, and support services are most helpful to students in navigating the school-to-work transition.

What you will do in this study:

In this study, you will participate in an interview where the researcher will ask you a series of approximately 10 questions to learn more about your experience surrounding the school-to-work transition. The researcher may contact you after the original interview for a follow-up interview to ask additional question to clarify emergent themes.

Length of time:

The interview will take approximately 20-30 minutes of your time. If the researcher requests a follow-up interview, it is expected the follow-up interview will also be 20-30 minutes long.

Withdrawal from the study:

In the interview, participants are free to skip any questions you do not wish to answer. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time up until the data analysis begins on July 31, 2016, at which point it will not be possible to separate individual participant's data from the themes that have emerged. You can withdraw by verbally

telling the researcher you do not wish for the interview to proceed or you may contact the researcher after the interview to withdraw from the study. The data collected up to the point of withdrawal will immediately be deleted from the researcher's password protected USB key and any hard-copy data, including this consent form, will be immediately destroyed by secure shredding.

Once the data analysis begins on July 31, 2016, it will no longer be possible to withdraw data from an individual. At this point, it would be impossible to separate an individual participant's data from the themes that have emerged through the coding process. Participants will be able to withdraw permission to use direct quotes attributed to their assigned pseudonym at any point up until dissemination of the research results which is expected to take place in October 2016. No participants will be able to withdraw once the thesis has been completed.

There are no consequences for participants if they choose to withdraw from the study.

Possible benefits:

You may benefit by knowing you have contributed to a better understanding of a topic that has not received much attention in the past, and in turn, may be contributing to the betterment of support for individuals going through the school-to-work transition.

In Northern Ontario, the transition from school-to-work for university graduates has not been explored in the literature. Northern Ontario struggles with population decline, an aging population, youth outmigration, and large fluctuations in employment as a result of a historically resource-based economy. Sault Ste. Marie is presently in the midst of severe economic challenges with high rates of unemployment in the community. The scholarly community as well as the local community may benefit from filling this gap in the literature.

Possible risks:

Although the risks involved in participating in this research project are minimal, you should know there is a potential risk of experiencing psychological/emotional discomfort during the interview. This could include embarrassment, anxiety, or you could become upset. You have the right to withdraw at any point from the interview. In addition, the researcher has provided you with a printed directory of where to go for help in Sault Ste. Marie if you are experiencing mental distress. The researcher will have a telephone in the meeting room to ensure participants can immediately call the crisis intervention hotline if necessary.

There is also a potential for social risk such as stigma or negative changes in relationships given the limitations of maintaining privacy and anonymity in a relatively small community. While the researcher will take all possible precautions to ensure the identities of participants are kept confidential and anonymous, there is a potential for social risk for participants in a study that may produce a group of participants who are familiar with each other.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is ensuring that identities of participants are accessible only to those authorized to have access. Only the researcher and her supervisor will have access to data collected as a part of this study. The data from this research project will be published in a Masters thesis and in a summary report that will be posted on the Algoma University website, however, your identity will be kept confidential. Although the researcher may use direct quotations from the interviews, you will be given a pseudonym and all identifying information (organization name, specific program of study, position, etc.) will be removed from the report.

In addition, following the interview and before the data is analyzed, you will be able to review a summary of the interview on an Interview Check Back Form. You will be able to add, change, or delete information on this form if you feel it does not accurately represent the interview in which you participated.

Anonymity:

Every reasonable effort will be made to ensure anonymity in the reporting of results and the final thesis. Participants will be assigned a pseudonym and this pseudonym will be used when reporting research results. The master key linking participant's names to their assigned pseudonym will be maintained in the researcher's locked office and destroyed by secure shredding upon completion of the study.

Recording of Data:

The researcher will audio-record and then transcribe as the study progresses. The audio-recordings will be retained on a password-protected USB key and kept in the researcher's locked office at Algoma University. No one other than the researcher will have access to the audio-recordings. This consent form includes a check-box for you to indicate agreement, or not, to the use of an audio-recording device.

Storage of Data:

The only individuals who will have access to the data (audio-recordings and transcripts, interview check back forms) is the researcher and her supervisor. All data will be retained only on a password-protected USB key or in paper form and will be kept in the researcher's locked office at Algoma University (NW300). Upon completion of the research, the researcher will destroy by secure shredding the master key linking pseudonyms to individual names. All other data (paper copies and USB key) will be retained for a minimum of five years in the researcher's locked office as required by Memorial University's policy on Integrity in Scholarly Research.

Email correspondence with participants will be immediately copied to the USB key, permanently deleted from the researcher's email account, and retained in the researcher's locked office. Email correspondence will be maintained with the data in the researcher's locked office and will be retained for five years and destroyed along with the rest of the data.

Reporting of Results:

The data collected will be used to compose a thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the researcher's Master of Education. Data will be reported in a summarized form references themes emerging from the data. In instances where specific references to individual and/or direct quotations are used the data will be reported using assigned pseudonyms. Direct quotes will not be used without the express permission of the participant.

Sharing of Results with Participants:

Participants will be invited to a public presentation at Algoma University upon completion of the study. In addition, a short report summarizing the findings will be created for participants and key stakeholders at the research site. This summary report will be distributed by email to all participants and posted on the Algoma University website.

In addition, the complete Masters thesis will be publically available once it is published in the Memorial University digital archives at <http://collections.mun.ca/cdm/search/collection/theses> .

Questions:

You are welcome to ask questions at any time during your participation in this research. If you would like more information about this study, please contact: Dawn Elmore, dawn.elmore@algomau.ca or 705-949-2301 ext. 4372 or her supervisor, Dr. Vernon Curran, at vcurran@mun.ca or 709-777-7542.

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research, such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

Consent:

Your signature on this form means that:

- You have read the information about the research.
- You have been able to ask questions about this study.
- You are satisfied with the answers to all your questions.
- You understand what the study is about and what you will be doing.
- You understand that you are free to withdraw from the study without having to give a reason and that doing so will not affect you now or in the future.
- You understand that any data collected from you up to the point of your withdrawal will be destroyed.

If you sign this form, you do not give up your legal rights and do not release the researchers from their professional responsibilities.

Your signature:

I have read what this study is about and understood the risks and benefits. I have had adequate time to think about this and had the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered.

I agree to participate in the research project understanding the risks and contributions of my participation, that my participation is voluntary, and that I may end my participation.

I agree to be audio-recorded during the interview. Yes No

I agree to the use of quotations using my assigned pseudonym. Yes No

A copy of this Informed Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

Signature of participant

Date

Researcher's Signature:

I have explained this study to the best of my ability. I invited questions and gave answers. I believe that the participant fully understands what is involved in being in the study, any potential risks of the study and that he or she has freely chosen to be in the study.

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

Appendix F: Sample interview questions for Algoma University graduates

Preamble

My name is Dawn Elmore and I am completing research for my M.Ed. thesis through Memorial University of Newfoundland. Thank you for taking the time to meet with me. I am going to ask you a series of open-ended questions about your experience of the school-to-work transition in a Northern Ontario context. The interview should take about 20-30 minutes. You are free to skip any questions that you do not wish to answer. The Informed Consent and Information Form contains detailed information about the research. Please take some time now to read through the Informed Consent Form. Do you have any questions about the consent form?

Following the interview, I will transcribe the interview and summarize the main themes. I will send a completed interview check-back form to you for review, and ask that you read through it to ensure it accurately represents your understanding of our discussion. If it does, please email it back to me confirming this. I will only retain interview data for which the participant has provided confirmation.

My research is being conducted using grounded theory research design. Grounded theory is an iterative process that requires the researcher to return to data sources as the theory develops from the data. I may be in touch again over the next three months to further explore the topic. Are you comfortable with this?

Do you have any other questions before we begin?

Sample Questions

1. When did you graduate from Algoma University?
 - a. What program did you take?
 - b. What is your gender?
 - c. How old are you?
 - d. Do you self-identify as Indigenous? (*note: if individual self-identifies, researcher to ask if culturally-appropriate assistance is required to interpret or participate in the research*)
2. What are you doing now for work?
3. What were your expectations/hopes (career-wise) when you graduated?
4. While you were in university, did you access support services you felt would help prepare you for the world of work (i.e. co-op program, career services)? Tell me about how you feel these services influenced your school-to-work transition.

5. Did you have any experiences while you were in university that you feel prepared you for the school-to-work transition? This can include experiences such as extracurricular activities or a part-time job. Describe how these experiences contributed to your experience after graduation.
6. Tell me about what the school-to-work transition was like for you.
 - a. Walk me through the key experiences related to the transition from graduation to now.
7. As you were experiencing the transition, did you access any services or participate in any programs that you are aware of that are unique to Northern Ontario (for example, Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Internship programs?) What was your experience like with these services or programs?
8. How did your university education prepare you for the school-to-work transition in Northern Ontario?
9. What skills, knowledge, and values have been most valuable in supporting the school-to-work transition for you? In what ways?
10. Looking back, are there ways you feel your university education could have better prepared you for the school-to-work transition? If so, in what ways?
11. Do you have anything else you would like to share about the school-to-work transition?

Appendix G: Sample interview questions for service providers

Preamble

My name is Dawn Elmore and I am completing research for my M.Ed. thesis through Memorial University of Newfoundland. Thank you for taking the time to meet with me. I am going to ask you a series of open-ended questions about your experience supporting the school-to-work transition in a Northern Ontario context. The interview should take about 20-30 minutes. You are free to skip any questions that you do not wish to answer. The Informed Consent and Information Form contains detailed information about the research. Please take some time now to read through the Informed Consent Form. Do you have any questions about the consent form?

Following the interview, I will transcribe the interview and summarize the main themes. I will send a completed interview check-back form to you for review, and ask that you read through it to ensure it accurately represents your understanding of our discussion. If it does, please email it back to me confirming this. I will only retain interview data for which the participant has provided confirmation.

My research is being conducted using grounded theory research design. Grounded theory is an iterative process that requires the researcher to return to data sources as the theory develops from the data. I may be in touch again over the next three months to further explore the topic. Are you comfortable with this?

Do you have any other questions before we begin?

Sample Questions

1. What is your role and how does it relate to the school-to-work transition for Algoma University graduates?
2. How long have you been in this role, and what did you do before this?
3. Have you always lived and worked in Sault Ste. Marie? Tell me about your experience working outside of Sault Ste. Marie and how it compares to your experience working in Sault Ste. Marie.
4. In your experience, what are the key challenges and successes for recent university graduates seeking to enter the Sault Ste. Marie labour market?
5. Tell me about the alignment between the expectations/hopes (career-wise) of recent Algoma University graduates and the realities of the labour market they seek to enter?
6. As you support the transition, do you facilitate access to any services or programs that are unique to Northern Ontario? What is your experience like

with these services or programs? How do these programs serve recent graduates?

7. Are there other factors you feel are unique to a Sault Ste. Marie or Northern Ontario context that impact on the school-to-work transition experience for recent Algoma University graduates?
8. How does university education prepare graduates for the school-to-work transition in Sault Ste. Marie?
9. What skills, knowledge, and values are most valuable in supporting the school-to-work transition? In what ways? Do you feel these skills, knowledge and values are those that are developed through a university education? Tell me about your thoughts on this.
10. Are there ways you feel Algoma University could better prepared graduates for the school-to-work transition? If so, how?
11. Do you have anything else you would like to share about the school-to-work transition?

Appendix H: Overview of Codes and Themes

This table illustrates the original coding scheme for the data. The first round of coding resulted in 31 codes. These were collapsed into 21 codes to reduce overlap and redundancy. These 21 codes were then grouped in accordance with five overarching themes.

Table 3: Overview of Codes and Themes used in Data Analysis

Overarching Themes	Associated Second Level Codes	Associated First Level Codes
Preparation in curriculum	Preparation in curriculum	Funding support
		Lack of capacity in the north
		Preparation in curriculum
	Assistance from community agencies	Assistance from community agencies
Work experience	Internships	Access barriers for internships
	Work experience	Work experience
	More hands on	More hands on
	Practical experience	Practical experience
		Learn on the job
Second career	Second career	
Expectation clash	Racism	Racism
	Sense of entitlement	Sense of entitlement
		Career expectations
	Tough labour market	Tough labour market
Opportunity		
Fear	Fear	
Networking	Extracurricular involvement	Volunteer work
		Extracurricular involvement
	Networks	Networks
	Networking	Networking

		Leveraging local connections and skills
Soft skills	Never give up	Never give up
		Coping skills
	Self-awareness	Self-awareness
	First Nation perspective	First Nation perspective
	Entrepreneurial thinking	Entrepreneurial
	Communication skills	Classroom participation
		Key skills
		Soft skills
	Make a plan	Make a plan
Technical skills	Technical skills	