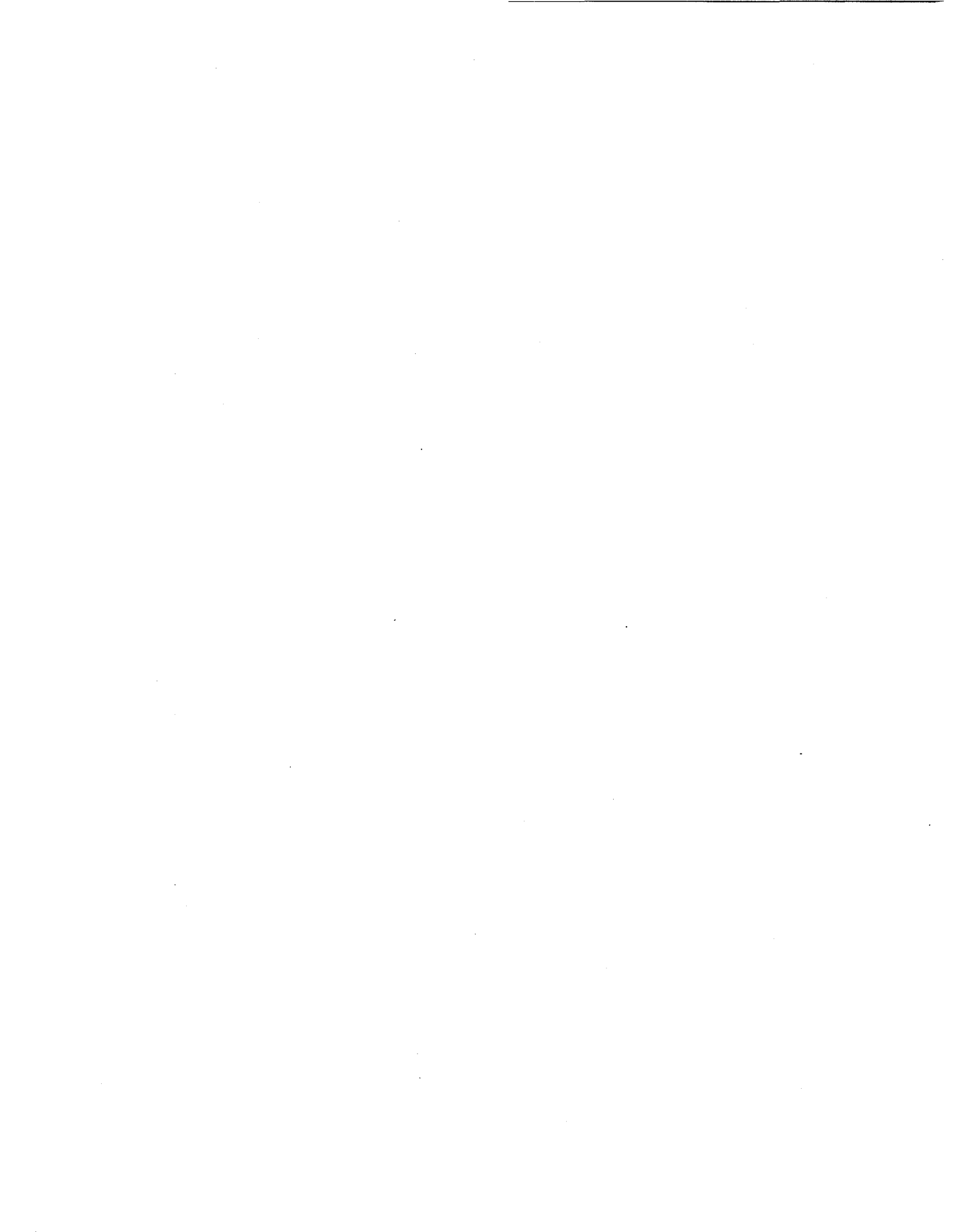


JOE-JOB, MCJOB, NOT A *REAL* JOB



**JOE-JOB, MCJOB, NOT A *REAL* JOB: A STUDY OF WORKING POST-
SECONDARY STUDENTS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA**

By

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A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in
Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Arts

McMaster University

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MASTER OF ARTS (2006)
(Work and Society)

McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Joe-Job, McJob, Not a *Real* Job: A Study of Working Post-Secondary Students in the Greater Toronto Area

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NUMBER OF PAGES: v, 70

Abstract: Unpredictable schedules, low pay and poor treatment are all too often central characteristics of the types of employment post-secondary students are able to find. Coupled with rising tuition many students face increased pressure to balance paid employment with their studies. The largest proportion of working students are found in the retail, hospitality and food services industries, where employer demands for flexibility are high. This thesis aims to understand how student working conditions affect their ability to pursue their education. The study posits the question as to whether the employment ‘opportunities’ available to students, where scheduling demands are high, risk affecting the very education they are working to pursue. How then do students navigate the difficult decision about whether to seek out paid employment or rely on student loans? The thesis also works to briefly examine if and how neo-liberal restructuring has exasperated conditions for student workers.

This thesis, written in the muggy summer months of Toronto could not have been sustained without the support of Roger. Thank you for all the great discussions, delicious dinners, island picnics and encouragement.

My supervisor, Wayne Lewchuk, was a great help and kept me on-track and focused. Wayne always made the time to meet and discuss the project's progression. He even took the time to teach me STATA, which allowed me to work with data that greatly enriched the project. Thank you Wayne!

The love and support of my parents carries me sailing through life's challenges. Once again they have been with me every step of the way this past year. Thank you mom and dad for the continuum of unconditionally!

Sarah, my labour studies "BF", has been such an inspiration. Her passion and involvement propelled me through this year. Sarah, your friendship and support means so much.

Thank you also to the working students who took the time out of their very busy schedules to meet and share their stories. I hope I was true to their experiences and have begun to shed some light onto their issues.

**Joe-Job, McJob, Not a *Real* Job: A Study of Working Post-Secondary
Students in the Greater Toronto Area**

Emily C. Watkins

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Introduction

They serve us our coffee, scan our groceries and take our orders at restaurants and fast food establishments. Seen by many but, surprisingly, relatively understudied, the student worker is often at the front line of the service sector workplace. Part-time employment is a reality for many post-secondary students, forcing them to balance their working and student lives. According to a recent study by Statistics Canada close to one-half of students between the ages of 18-24 balance paid employment with their schooling (Usalca et al, 2006). Considering that labour market conditions are deteriorating overall for young workers one can assume that finding a ‘decent’ student job has become increasingly difficult (Jackson, 2005a). Unpredictable schedules, low pay and poor treatment are too often central characteristics of the types of employment working students are able to find. Coupled with escalating tuition levels many working students face increased pressure to try and make this balance work.

This study, with a focus on the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), will seek to understand the kinds of labour market and working conditions post-secondary students face. The study posits the question as to whether an essential contradiction exists for working students, because as we attempt to understand the

lives and working conditions of students, clear conflicts emerge. Do the employment ‘opportunities’ available to students, often where employer demands for ‘flexibility’ are high, risk threatening the very education they are working to pursue? How then do working students respond to this contradiction? How do they navigate the difficult decisions about whether to work more or to rely on higher debt loads? Indeed what is the price students pay to afford a post-secondary education?

This thesis begins with a portrait of working students in Canada, investigating past and present labour market conditions. It reflects on both cyclical and long-term trends experienced by this group of workers over the past 20 years. This section will investigate whether the current growth in employment is in fact ‘working’ for students. It will also begin to examine how students are used in many of their workplaces as a flexible pool of labour.

The second section discusses the findings from interviews conducted with working students in the GTA and analyses data from the McMaster Work and Health Survey. This section focuses largely on the scheduling problems student workers often encounter. Nevertheless, it will also explore other aspects of their working lives, including access to health and safety, treatment by managers and some of the marked gender differences between this group of workers.

In the third section this study will attempt to understand the larger ‘narrative’ shaping the experiences of working students, in the context of neo-

liberal restructuring. It will ask to what extent the experiences of working students can be contextualized in light of changes to the labour market and the welfare state over the past 20 years? The section will begin to draw some links between experiences of the students profiled in this study and a shift over the past two decades to more flexible forms of employment. Over the last 10 years there has been a marked change in social policy direction and its impact on funding for post-secondary education has been significant. In short, my thesis relies on student experiences to understand if and how the labour market conditions they face are being accentuated by neo-liberalism.

Student workers arguably are among the most marginalized workers. They face lower wages, fewer benefits, less job security and lower rates of unionization than any other age group in the workforce (Jackson, 2005a; Tannock, 2003). Retail, hospitality and food services hire the largest proportion of student workers (60%), all industries characterised by high degrees of scheduling volatility (Usalca & Bowlby, 2006). Students in these industries are often treated as ‘filler’ employees. They are called on to meet the ebbs and flows of customer demand and as a result have little control over their schedules. Particularly in the retail and food services industries, students are being used as a “just in time workforce” (Tannock, 2001). At the same time, tuition fees in Ontario have also increased 195 per cent since the early 1990’s (Statistics Canada, 2004) and with the recent lifting of the tuition cap in Ontario, students could expect to see up to a

20 per cent increase in the first year alone (Canadian Federation of Students, 2006).

Despite these realities, a number of misconceptions surround student workers. Their work is often seen as a rite of passage into the ‘real world of work’; their jobs considered “Joe Jobs”, “McJobs”, not *real* jobs. In public policy discourse student work is often portrayed as good for youth ‘development’. Employment is prescribed as a site to learn skills such as interpersonal, communication and financial management (Bowldry et al., 2002). The student job is the place where youth ‘develop’ into full-fledged members of the labour market. Consequently questions about working conditions and job quality are frequently overlooked.

Very little research has been undertaken on the specific labour market and working conditions of post-secondary students, with the exception of Tannock (2001; 2003). Others have recently sought to understand conditions for young workers in Canada, but not specifically working students (Beaudry et al., 2000; Jackson, 2005; Marquardt, 1998 & McBride, 2004). Greenberger and Steinberg’s *When Teenagers Work*, published in the 1980’s, is recognized as one of the first studies to critically examine youth work. As a result of their research, popular assumptions about student work began to be seriously questioned (Tannock, 2003). Greenberger and Steinberg’s findings reveal that it is difficult to argue that youth work is essentially ‘enriching’. The pair of researchers show that most

teenage work involves routine and repetitive tasks with very little opportunity for training. Both MacDonald & Sirianni (1996) and Leidner (1993) also explore work organization methods deployed in typical student and youth workplaces. Management techniques, they argue, are based around routinization and deskilling and allow workers to be easily replaced. These ‘techniques’ in turn ‘rationalize’ lower wages by minimizing autonomy and the requirement of specific ‘skills’.

These studies bring to light questions about the lives and working conditions of student workers. When working students are asked to reflect on their own experiences and motivations the ‘complexities’ of their stories surface. A story of juggling and a balancing act mired with tough decisions emerges. This group of workers face deteriorating labour market conditions and difficult working conditions. Although working for the ‘experience’ is a factor, many working students need to support themselves and pay for an education that is becoming more expensive.

Public policy geared to young workers, and even research in the area, tends to overlook the financial needs of young student workers. Even in Leidner’s comprehensive critique of labour practices in fast food establishments in the U.S., we see a glossing over of concerns for youth and teenage workers (1993):

If we assume that most McDonald’s workers are teenagers who are in school and are not responsible for supporting themselves or others, then many of the features of McDonald’s work do not seem so bad. Fringe

benefits and employment security are relatively unimportant to them, and the limited and irregular hours of work may actually be attractive (52).

Here, Leidner risks dismissing the realities of work for many students.

Teenagers, more so than older youth, may very well be working for extra money but, with the increased cost of tuition this reality may be changing. For example, of the students interviewed for this study, a number had worked in high school with the goal of saving for their post-secondary education. Student concerns over regular hours and some degree of job security should not be treated as insignificant.

Methodology

The goal of this study is to paint a picture of the lives and working conditions of post-secondary students engaged in paid employment. Empirical research has been undertaken in Canada as to their labour market conditions, but little work had been done to document and analyse their actual work experiences. This study aims to contextualize their experiences in the data known about their labour market conditions, from sources such as Statistics Canada and the McMaster Work and Health Survey. In short, it uses their stories to complement the statistical data. The project also seeks to challenge some of the assumptions made about student work.

Ten working students between the ages of 18-24 were interviewed for this study.¹ All attend full-time studies at one of the three major universities in the Toronto area: the University of Toronto, York University and Ryerson University. Out of the group of ten students six are male and four female. Five of the students interviewed work in retail and/or food services, while two are currently unemployed. Of the remaining three, two are employed in recreational type occupations and the other is currently working through a co-op programme at an insurance company. Seven out of ten of the student participants interviewed identified themselves on the McMaster Work and Health Survey as non-white.

¹ See p.65 for list of Working Student Interview Participants.

Students were interviewed for approximately 45 minutes with some interviews varying in length. The interview guide (see Appendix A) was utilized to ensure similar ground was covered with each participant. The interviews were conversational in nature with many of the students sharing details of their work, educational, family and health related issues. The questions focused more on their lives as workers as opposed to their educational pursuits. Each participant consented to be interviewed and was aware that the interviews were being recorded (See Appendix B). Students were compensated with a \$25 honorarium for their time. Most interviews took place at the Workers Action Centre, a location conveniently close to public transit and the University of Toronto downtown campus. Upon request two students were interviewed in a location that was more convenient for them.

The group was randomly selected from respondents to the McMaster Work and Health Survey. The project based in the Labour Studies Program at McMaster University surveyed workers over the age of 18 in the GTA. Of that survey group 626 were working students. Every fifth student was selected from a sample that had eliminated students who made personal incomes over \$40,000, had lived in Canada less than 3 years and/or anyone who was self-employed with employees. Of the larger group only 28 met these aforementioned criteria and were eliminated. The list of approximately 120 students was called through in chronological order. Some of the potential interview participants were either not

available and a few refused to be interviewed, mostly citing that they were too busy. The list of students was called through over a month-long period until 10 interviews were scheduled.

Data from the McMaster Work and Health Survey was also analysed to gain further insights into this group of workers. Data was collected through a fixed response self-administered survey conducted between September and December of 2005. The core set of surveys were drawn from 60 Toronto area census tracts representing 145,109 households and 498,560 individuals who reported working at the time of the census.

A population based sampling strategy was used in this project. Census tracts were selected with the goal of over-sampling employees in precarious employment relationships. Two criteria were applied: the percentage of employed people normally working full-time was less than 80% and the median household income was less than \$70,000.

During the fall of 2005, all households in the selected census tracts received a multilingual postcard inviting all members of the household over the age of 18 and who worked in the previous month to participate in the project. The postcards included information on how to obtain either a hard copy or an electronic copy of the survey. Participants were offered \$10.00 for completing the survey. Participants mailed in the survey, submitted the survey by e-mail, or completed an online version of the survey. Surveys were available in English,

Chinese and Tamil. Posters with tear-off information sheets were also posted in public spaces in the targeted areas to encourage more individuals to participate. Those who completed the survey were provided with additional postcards, which they were asked to distribute to people they thought might be interested in completing the survey. A number of people heard about the online survey through e-mails sent by individuals who had completed the survey. A total of 3,244 surveys were received. Both the findings from the interviews and the survey data will be explored in the second section of this thesis.

Portrait of Labour Market Conditions for Student Workers

Participation in post-secondary education is at a record high in Canada.

One in three youth between the ages of 20-24 have participated in some form of post-secondary education, compared to a rate of one in five in the mid 1980's (Jackson, 2005a). "Youth in Transition", a longitudinal study by Statistics Canada, found that by the end of their five-year study period 76 per cent of 22-24 year olds had participated in some form of post-secondary education (Statistics Canada, 2006b). The study also found that the transition from school to work is not as clear-cut as it may have been 20 years ago. The transition for youth has become both delayed and fragmented (Jackson, 2005a), with many young adults moving back and forth between high school, post-secondary, and the labour market.

Researchers now estimate that the transition from school to work takes approximately 8 years (Usalca & Bowlby, 2006). Many buffer the difficulties associated with this transition by prolonging the time they live in the family home. In 1981, 42 per cent of 20-24 year olds were living at home; by 2001 that number jumped to 58 per cent. Most striking is the almost one-quarter of young adults aged 25-29 years still living in the family home (Ibid). This could be considered a strategy to shield them from many of the harsher realities of the labour market and the escalating cost of tuition. It could also be argued that parents are "subsidizing" the faltering labour market conditions of their children,

allowing employers to keep wages and conditions lower for young and student workers. With many student workers in the low-wage retail, food and accommodation industries, families are often providing the additional support young people require while they are arguably getting very little in the way of ‘benefits’ or ‘skills’ from their ‘low end’ service sector jobs (Tannock, 2001). Living longer with parents, increased tuition and a growing trend towards a fragmented transition from school to work reflect both the difficulty of finding good jobs and the need for higher levels of education to obtain these ‘better’ jobs (Jackson, 2005a).

Conditions for young workers (15-24) overall have deteriorated in the last 20 years. The recessions of the early 1980’s and 90’s marked high youth unemployment levels and many key labour market indicators have never fully recovered (Jackson, 2005a; McBride, 2004). The gap between adult and youth unemployment still exists and youth incomes are in decline (McBride, 2004). Almost half of all young workers (15-24) not in school and who are working full-time are low paid, meaning that they earn below the poverty line for a single person. With harsh labour market realities the incentive to stay in school is greater (Jackson, 2005a). Though some indicators point to a recovery in youth unemployment levels, it does not necessarily mean the job market is really ‘working’ for youth. More attention needs to be paid to the nature of this

‘recovery’ in order to uncover current labour market realities for youth and student workers.

On the surface, economic indicators show that youth unemployment (ages 15-24) has improved. During the 1981-82 recession, youth unemployment rates reached a high of 20 per cent, dropping to 11.2 per cent by 1989, only to rise again in the recession of the 1990’s. At its peak in 1992, youth unemployment was at 17.3 per cent, almost 6 percentage points higher than the workforce as a whole (Jackson, 2005b). With much ground to make up, Statistics Canada recently noted that youth employment during the 1997-2004 period grew at a faster pace than employment for those 25 years and over (Usalcas, 2005). Currently at a ‘low’ of 11.4 per cent (Statistics Canada, 2006c), this is still 5.3 percentage points higher than the adult unemployment rate (Statistics Canada, 2006a). For older working students (18-24) job availability has also improved over recent years. Their participation rates have never been higher, though only recently surpassing their 1989 levels (Usalcas & Bowlby, 2006). However, a notable gap exists between working students aged 15-17 and 18-24. While 46 per cent of the older group work, only 31.2 per cent of the younger set are employed. Student wages and participation rates have gone up over the last 10 years and it is important to note then that by some indicators point to an improvement in conditions.

Since the mid to late 1990's average wages for older students have seen moderate gains; in 2006 they are up 2.1 per cent from 1997-1998 levels (Usalca & Bowlby, 2006). Younger students (15-17) have not enjoyed the same gains and their wages have fallen 1.8 per cent over the same time period (Ibid). However, when we trace wage levels back to the mid 1970's another picture emerges. Young men aged 15-24 only earn about 75 per cent of what their counterparts did; for women this is slightly better with young female workers today making 80 per cent of what the female youth cohort made in the 1970's (Jackson 2005a). In short, although wages appear to be growing in recent years, it's only with a long-term analysis that we can see that labour market conditions, in terms of *real* wages, have deteriorated for youth over the last 30 years. Low-wage workers in all age categories have also faced a similar fate. The proportion of low-wage workers in Canada has not fallen over the past twenty-five years, and their real wages have stagnated since the early part of 1980's (Jackson, 2006). It is not surprising to learn that nearly half of all minimum wage workers in Canada are between the ages of 15-19 and that another 15 per cent are between the ages of 20-24, with approximately 44 per cent of the latter group being students (Sussman, 2004).

Decreasing real wages coming at a time when tuition levels continue to rise in Ontario understandably makes funding one's education a challenge. The majority of older working students (18-24) heavily rely on their earnings to fund

their studies (Statistics Canada, 2006b). In dollar amounts, personal earnings are the largest sources of funds for post-secondary studies reported by students in a *Postsecondary Education Participation Study (PEPS)* (Ibid). The PEP Study also found that income from employment and personal savings (another major source of funding for post-secondary students) were inadequate to cover the costs of tuition, books and other necessary supplies. As a result of changes in the labour market there has been a drastic change in funding sources for post-secondary students. A study of undergraduate living conditions found that student sources of funding have dramatically changed since the introduction of the Canada Student Loan Programs in 1964 (Cervenak et al., 2004). While income from summer employment dropped dramatically, income from work done during the school year rose sharply. While overall youth unemployment has marginally improved the youth summer job market is still faltering. Youth summer employment rates have yet to reach 1989 level highs. The summer employment rate for older students aged 20 to 24 sits at 69.7 per cent, but remains well below the all-time high reached in June 1989 of 79.7% per cent (Statistics Canada, 2006a). Students unable to find decent jobs in the summer are presumably compensating by working more throughout the school year.

Wages alone are not enough to cover school and living costs; the average debt for Canadian post-secondary students is now over \$20,000. The Canadian Policy Research Network (CPRN) argues that more research needs to be done on

the amount of personal debt parents are incurring as well, as they struggle to fund their children's post-secondary education (Hemingway et al. 2004). In 2001, Statistics Canada found that, though parental support is still a major source of funding for students, most families were not saving enough money to pay for their children's education. The CPRN suspects that parents are incurring their own debt but little research has been done yet to confirm this.

As a likely result of deteriorating wages, students are working longer hours than ever before. The average number, of hours worked has increased over the past eight years. In 2004-2005 school year student employees spent an average of 15.3 hours at their main job compared to 13-14 hours in the 1980's and 90's (Usalcas & Bowlby, 2006). A general assumption in much of the student work literature is that employment begins to have a negative effect on study time when students work over 15-20 hours a week. Under 15-20 hours work per week, most post-secondary students lose leisure and personal care time rather than reducing the amount of time they would spend on their studies (Franke, 2003). Whether working over 20 hours a week affects educational outcomes, i.e. grades, is an interesting question but is not one that this study is able to adequately cover. Nevertheless, coupled with little control over scheduling, managing to parcel off time to do school, let alone other activities, can, one can begin to assume, become increasingly difficult.

Reducing study time because of employment commitments is especially prevalent among female working students. Women cut their educational time from 6.4 hours per day to 2.9 *and* also eliminated virtually all leisure pursuits. (Franke, 2003). With the amount of average hours worked slowly creeping up for post-secondary students we begin to see a dangerous pattern emerge. If studies are correct that working over 15 hours can negatively affect educational pursuits the average working student is already in that territory, with an average work week of 15.3 hours.

Young female students are more likely than their male counterparts to balance work and school. The gender gap continues to grow with 50.5 per cent of female students aged 18-24 employed compared to 40.7 per cent of male students (Usalcas & Bowlby, 2006). The larger proportion of female working students is likely due to the increased employment growth in retail, accommodation and food services. Sixty per cent of student workers are found in these sectors and they are industries ‘traditionally’ more likely to hire female workers (Usalcas & Bowlby, 2006). Female students have also been the beneficiaries of growth in the information, culture and recreation industries.

Overall, older youth workers (20-24 years of age) make higher hourly wages than teens 15-19 years: \$11.89 compared to \$8.14. A disturbing trend though is developing between male and female teens. While teen incomes are not keeping up with inflation female teen hourly wages have experienced an even

more drastic decline with a 3.6 per cent decrease compared to 2.2 per cent decrease for males (Usalcas, 2005). The reason for this is an increase in female employment in the retail, accommodation and food service industries where wages are depressed. A trend is emerging where youth wages are not increasing and young women are bearing more of the brunt of the downward spiral. Male workers unfortunately may soon join their female counterparts in seeing a continued decline in their wages, as jobs in construction, manufacturing, natural resources, agriculture, transportation and warehousing, industries that tend to hire more young men and pay better, are in decline (Usalcas, 2005). In many ways it is a perverse road to gender parity.

Vosko's reading of the feminization of the employment process can be drawn upon to further understand why more female than male students work. Working as a cashier, food or beverage server and/or retail salesperson are still largely considered 'women's work'. Vosko argues that precariousness is in its sharpest form where there are high levels of women in the workforce (2000). In short, she asserts that precarious work is gendered, because precarious jobs point to a trend towards the feminization of work.

Can we then come to understand the student labour market as becoming more precarious as it becomes increasingly feminised? Student work has likely always been precarious work, in that presumably 30 years ago low pay, minimal job security and irregular working hours were central characteristics. Whether

student work has become more definitively precarious over the last few decades remains difficult to determine within the scope of this thesis. It would be interesting to explore further whether some of the scheduling volatility that appears to characterize current student work experiences was felt as acutely by working students in the past.

An analysis of the student labour market should also consider how racial discrimination plays out for student workers. Research by the Canadian Labour Congress looks at how racial discrimination plays out in the labour market outcomes of young workers of colour (Jackson, 2005), though no specific work has been done on student workers in Canada. Since, 42 per cent of Toronto's youth population belongs to a visible minority group and nationwide one in six young people in Canada belong to a visible minority group this omission overlooks a significant portion of the student labour market. Since students are generally inexperienced to begin with and a large proportion (41 per cent) of young workers of colour are born in Canada, a lack of education or "Canadian experience", obstacles often presented as barriers to the performance of immigrants in the Canadian labour market, do not apply.

Even though visible minority youth are more likely to have higher rates of educational attainment than non-visible minority/non-immigrant youth, their rate of unemployment in 2001 was more than 3 percentage points higher. The hardest hit are black youth born in Canada with a unemployment rate 8 percentage points

higher and a employment rate of only 33.2 per cent compared to 58.4 per cent of non-visible minority/non immigrant youth (Jackson, 2005). Racial discrimination in hiring and promotions and in the workplace is likely a major factor behind these numbers.

A 'Flexible' Workforce:

Students are concentrated in industries that rely heavily on part-time employees, where demand for odd hours, weekends, holidays and evening hours are high. Many working students are able to meet the demands for a flexible workforce as they often are looking for odd or minimal hours to accommodate their school schedules. Retail, for example is characterised by significant fluctuations in customer flow, which pose a 'problem' for managers as they attempt to insure they have enough staff when demand is high and not overstaff unnecessarily at other times (Jany Cartrice, 2005). In a multi-country study of the retail industry in Europe researchers found that a number of different work organization techniques were used in order for employers to manage personnel deployment (Ibid). For example, 'gap fillers' were deployed on regular rotations; they would work predictable time slots, mainly peak times and fixed delivery days. 'Time adjusters' were used as an even more flexible workforce used as a type of 'on call' employee where their times vary in accordance with customer demand. In many of these situations the workers used were students.

The practice of hiring students for flexible work arrangements often leads to a highly segmented workforce (Ibid). The most visible and best-documented examples of segmentation are in fast food industry. Reiter found in her study of a Canadian Burger King outlet that staffing was comprised of a core of ‘older’ women who worked during the day and a younger legion of students who worked part-time in the evenings and on weekends (1991). This segmentation Lucas argues has a downward effect on wages and conditions. She claims that,

[b]y employing students, capital can deploy a reparatory of control strategies to further maximize its control over labour. Young labour is differentiated and, therefore, divided from other labour in a number of ways. Most particularly it is cheaper and is probably more flexible...(610)

When students are introduced into a workplace there can also sometimes be seen the deterioration of the quality of the occupation. Hughes’ study of the grocery industry in the U.S. found that employers have increased part-time hiring dramatically over the last two decades (1999). At the same time a pattern of two-tier collective agreements in unionized grocery industry emerged where lower pay rates were developed and applied to all new hires (Ibid). Students, she found, made up the bulk of new part-time hires, they were brought in to work peak hours, holiday and summer hours. Hughes’ study also revealed that scheduling was based preferentially on seniority meaning students were more subjected to manager demands for ‘around the clock’ availability.

Van der Meer and Wielers’s examination of student work and the Dutch

labour market also found that the participation rate of students has increased at a time when work is increasingly restructured to be more flexible (2001). Funding formula changes meant that Dutch students were paying more of the share of their education; many were taking on work that was often done at irregular hours and which involved low levels of education and training. Thus began a process in the 1980's of students displacing lower educated workers from the labour market. Their study points to a reality where students, when it comes to flexibility, may be in a better position to meet employer demands than lower educated workers.

This portrait of the student worker sheds light on how deteriorating labour market conditions have affected the student worker. Students are working more hours as their income in 'real' wages decreases. They are also increasingly drawn upon by employers to supply a flexible and unfortunately, cheaper pool of labour. While students can often take on flexible employment relationships, these types of jobs can come at a high personal cost. Tannock and Flocks' work on the experiences of young urban community college students in Northern California speaks volumes about the struggles many working students face trying to balance work and school in low-wage precarious employment (2003). With work schedules notoriously unstable and unpredictable in many of the types of industries working students are concentrated in, missed classes were common. Balancing work and school was simply impossible for many of the students interviewed. Many ended up dropping out of college, or cycling back and forth

between school and the labour market.

Considering the barriers flexible work is creating for students, like the participants in Tannock and Flocks' study, the impact of these types of employment relationships on the lives of working students must be seriously examined. Many more questions need to be raised about the lives of Canadian working students to understand the challenges they are facing. The next section seeks to do just that by discussing the life pressures which arise when an individual attempts to balance work and school.

Interview and Survey Findings

This next section presents the findings from 10 interviews conducted with working students in May and June of 2006. Through the interviews a picture of student work develops where not only scheduling poses problems for students but overall working conditions. A number of students profiled for this study face working conditions that not only risk interfering with their lives as student, but also violate employment rights and present significant health and safety concerns. Verbal abuse and favouritism by managers was not an uncommon experience. Rude and demanding customers also presented additional sources of stress at work.

This section begins with an exploration of some of the general themes coming out of the interviews such as financing, hours worked and income. This will then be followed up with a more substantive discussion of scheduling issues students encounter. The McMaster University Work and Health Survey is drawn upon to present some interesting findings about working students in the GTA, particularly how some of their survey responses differed vis-à-vis other part-time non-student workers.

Only three out of the ten students interviewed could confidently rely on their family to finance their university degree. The others felt work was an important part of helping to pay for their education. Work alone was never

enough for the seven students who had to support themselves through school. With the high cost of tuition, most used the money they received, from their predominately low paying jobs, to help cover costs such as transportation and other incidentals. For these students the bulk of their financing stemmed from student loans, government grants and/or scholarships. From the McMaster Work and Health Survey we learn that of the 626 full-time students surveyed individual incomes are low. Eighty per cent of the students make less than \$20,000 from their employment income with close to 60 per cent making less than \$10,000 (Table 1.1). The few that managed to save enough from paid employment to make significant contributions to their education worked regularly over 20 hours a week and faced a balance that was stressful and “overwhelming” at many points (J.W.).

Both J.W. and R.O., two undergraduate female university students, worked regularly over 20 hours a week at unionized grocery stores. The two young women felt highly motivated to earn the money they needed to cover their school costs without having to go into debt in the process. Out of the ten students interviewed, these two individuals reported the highest levels of stress and expressed throughout the interviews that they often felt the balance was difficult. J.W. was also the only student that identified stress related health issues.

R.O. expressed feeling worried that at times she cared little about school when she was feeling “like there was so much to do”. As a social work student

R.O. commented at length about the pressure she feels at school to become more involved and volunteer.

Everyone in my program we are all in the same boat (working and on OSAP). Our Profs do understand that in a way but they are always trying to get us more involved in extra curricular events for social work. We want to but we can't because we all have to work at night. So we get a lot of guilt at school for not being more involved but if you need tuition you need tuition.

R.O. finds it difficult to picture how she could also fit in volunteering and given her work and class schedule, it does appear a difficult feat. Participation in school clubs, student politics or sports can be as integral to the educational 'experience' as time spent in the classroom. Students who work 20 hours or more risk missing out on these types of activities.

Students without family financial support make difficult decisions about whether to work during the school year. A number of the students interviewed had quit jobs when they felt they interfered with their studies. Scheduling unpredictability was extremely common for a majority of the students and the unwillingness to jeopardize school meant that students cycle in and out of work depending on whether they feel they can handle the balance.

Of the working students surveyed for the McMaster Work and Health Project, 44 per cent identified that they were in permanent part-time employment relationships with 34 per cent on fix-term contracts. A surprising 6.5 per cent of full-time students reported having full-time permanent jobs. The majority of

students surveyed worked less than 20 hours a week (57%). However, what this also means is that a significant proportion of students in the GTA appear to be working over 20 hours a week, putting them in a situation where the ability to fully pursue their education may be difficult (Table 1.2).

J.W. worked at a discount grocery store through high school with the sole goal of saving money for her university degree. She knew her mother would not be able to afford to contribute to her education and saw employment as her way to ensure she went to university. She worked for over 4 years at the same workplace, but her employer would not meet her last scheduling requests. She had wanted to make adjustments to her schedule once she started university:

“[W]hen I first started I was working 23 hours per week on top of school. Later I did ask for less hours and I got 18 hours because I was overwhelmed. The main reason I quit the job was because I asked if I could just work one full day a week and they couldn’t do that for me so I quit.

J.W.’s decision to quit her part-time job because it risked jeopardizing her studies was not uncommon with the students interviewed for this project.

T.G., a second-year student, worked for a telephone survey company but was forced to quit when the company she worked for instituted a new policy. They demanded that everyone work at least 3 days a week. She had calculated that working two days a week was all she could handle with a full course load. T.G. now relies fully on OSAP to fund her post-secondary education but has been looking for a part-time job that could work with her studies for the past 6 months.

Moving in and out of work while in school seems to be a reality for many working students. They often ‘shuffle’ through jobs until they find one that can work with their schedule. Students look ideally for an employer that can provide them with a predictable and stable shift.

J.Y. worked for a year at a major fast food chain where he experienced what seems the worst of scheduling unpredictability. Hours were extremely irregular and the store manager was known to threaten hours would be reduced for ‘errors’ made at work.

It varied because just depending on how busy the store was frankly if the manager didn’t like me or not that day. Because depending on how much she liked you – you’d get more hours.

He describes the shifts he receives as a “rollercoaster”. Some weeks he works 20-30 hours a week and other times 3-4 hours; one week he was only scheduled for a two-hour shift. It was not uncommon for both J.Y. and P.G., who works in the restaurant of a major pizza chain, to have their shifts cancelled. J.Y. described a few instances where shifts were changed at the very last minute,

They’d call an hour before. Are you dressed yet? Yes. Oh well you don’t have to come. [Another time] it was supposed to be really busy. So they called everyone in there and it wasn’t really busy at all. After 20 minutes they sent me home it was supposed to be a 5-hour shift.

P.G. is also frequently sent home at the beginning of a shift. Usually, scheduled for 4-hour shifts, he sometimes arrives and is told to wait around before punching in. In these situations he would wait around for an hour or so and is usually given

a ‘complimentary’ meal if he is sent home. Once P.G. punches in he is given the 3-hours minimum of pay required by law if an employee shows up to work and the shift is cancelled. Clearly the employer is trying their best to avoid this rule and provides some free food in an attempt to placate complaints. J.Y. is not compensated when shifts are cancelled and was not aware this was a violation of his rights. He did not know he was entitled to a minimum of 3-hour pay when these types of changes occur.

During the interview P.G. spoke at length about a consistent pattern of pay irregularities at his restaurant. The pizza chain he works for is regularly deducting pay for breaks employees are not taking. As he points out, it is often not worth it to take the 15-minute break since missing a table because you are on break means that you are potentially forfeiting valuable tips. P.G. expresses his frustration with the situation;

It’s started to get to a point where it really bothers me. I keep my stubs for each shift. Basically they take 15 minutes away each shift. They just take it away no matter what. I’ve worked 4 shifts they’ve taken away an hour.

Losing an hour’s pay every 4 shifts equates to a significant amount relative to the pay he is receiving. He also believes the practice to be widespread in the restaurant; meaning the restaurant is potentially benefiting from countless hours of unpaid labour. He has brought this issue to the attention of the manager responsible for pay roll and “they get really upset”. Nevertheless, they have reimbursed him for the time, thereby admitting they know the practice is unfair.

Pay was also deducted from J.Y. for breaks that are never taken. When staffing levels in the fast food industry are calculated to match customer demand, stores are usually too busy for employees to take breaks. J.Y. had calculated that, because he was not paid for the breaks, he was usually making under minimum wage. Close to 25 per cent of the students surveyed for the McMaster Work and Health Survey reported that over half the time they were receiving the wrong pay. A significant proportion of student employers are not only paying low wages to students but are also effectively ‘skimming off’ further wages.

While a number of the students interviewed experience irregular scheduling and frequent changes, others have predictable shifts that do not change from week to week. D.O. works one shift a week at a large coffee chain. He can always rely on working Sunday afternoons and is sometimes called to work other shifts but is never pressured when he has to refuse. D.O. has made the difficult choice to rely almost exclusively on OSAP to fund his studies. The minimum amount of money he makes at his one day a week job is just a little extra money to help cover costs like transportation. When asked what he likes about his job he stated,

I see new people everyday. It’s like a break from my studies. I like to work there it keeps me away from all the crap from school.

Though he will eventually end up with close to \$50,000 in student debt upon graduation he is not “worried” about the loan at this point. School and marks

are so important to him he would never allow a job to interfere with his studies. These are the decision working students have to make when they do not have family financial support. Students have to weight their options in the labour market or rely heavily on student loans. Although a temporary buffer from severe financial strain, student loans are often the only viable option students see for themselves.

R.O. on the other hand is strongly motivated to work part-time to avoid student debt. Feeling pressured already by the loan she took out in her first-year, she regularly works 24 hours a week while in school full-time. She already has to make monthly interest payments on her bank loan, as she was not eligible for OSAP in her first year. R.O. is working as many hours as she can in an attempt to make tuition for next year, feeling for the first time some relief as she is close to her goal. R.O. does feel she is afforded the flexibility she needs when she wants to work less because of school. She related that the flexibility on her terms was because she has a “sympathetic” boss with college age children. The manager therefore “understood” what it was like to be a student. J.W. did not experience the same degree of control over her schedule R.O. enjoys. She conversely felt that her managers did not respect that she was a student and would not take school as a reason for a scheduling request. In a disturbing revelation J.W. revealed that one year:

...I took a temporary leave for a month for exams. They don't take exams as an excuse so I kind of had another excuse. I said my mom was sick. My mom was sick but it wasn't to the point that I need that time off specifically for her.

R.O. and J.W. were the only unionized workers interviewed, both working in the grocery industry. While R.O. felt the union played a positive role, J.W. had very little contact with her union over the 4 years she worked. Unfortunately, according to R.O. the quality of her unionized grocery store job is in danger. With talk by her managers of increased competition in the grocery industry she sees major change on the horizon:

Right now it's a bad time [at work] because they are making cutbacks and competing with Wal-Mart, trying to take away our union. [They] are trying to make all the stores take a pay cut and take away all our benefits. Basically it would be a horrible place to be after having been treated so well.

Unfortunately the few unionized jobs student have access to seem under threat. With competition used as a 'rationale' in the grocery industry they appear on the verge of buying the union out. R.O. felt she was soon to be offered a package by her employer and was willing to accept it. Although she was supportive of the union she felt no long-term commitment to her workplace and felt the extra money a package would provide could help pay tuition.

When parents pay for school, students who then 'choose' to work face less pressure to make the balance work. Both E.M. and S.L. live at home and their parents are paying for their tuition. Both have 'light jobs' working 8-10 hours a

week. S.L. is even able to do homework on the job and feels that working looks good on his resume and shows employers he is “responsible”. Both students expressed deep gratitude for their parent’s support and felt “lucky” about their situations.

Other students shared that they were motivated to work to relieve stress from their parents. J.Y. whose father recently had to leave work and go on long-term disability, felt working would help relieve his mother’s stress:

I think that’s one of the reasons I want to work I don’t want to see them suffer or see them go through so much stress. Because my mom manages the store and I don’t want too much pressure on her thinking how she’s going to make the next bill. So I guess I have to do my best.

He suspects that his parents had gone into debt to fund his older brothers’ educations and does not want to have his parents go through that again. Similarly J.W. felt that working meant her mom “had one less kid to worry about” and felt proud of her independence relative to her other siblings.

Students described managers that would yell at them in front of customers and they related stories of bullying and favouritism. J.Y. described a store manager at his fast food restaurant that would frequently yell at young employees for “not doing anything” and making simple mistakes. He related one experience of being yelled at in front of a line of customers for using the cup as a scoop rather than the metal scoop provided, a practice he had seen this particular manager engage in. He learned to look busy no matter what and would clean and

re-clean trays if there was nothing else to do. J.Y. of Chinese descent himself felt that “minorities were issued more work”.

R.O. also shared a number of particularly disturbing stories about one of the managers at her grocery store:

He kind of gangs up on people and tries to get people in trouble for no reason. Last weekend he came up to me and said make sure you are in full uniform because I want to get this other girl K in trouble and I don't want to drag you down with her. I didn't know what to say to that. Basically he's telling me he's going after someone. I ended up telling her because I didn't think that it was fair.

She also related a story of a young woman who she felt had been singled out and harassed because of her sexual orientation. Management had moved the employee to a non-unionized position in the store and then according to R.O. escalated the harassment. Other students interviewed expressed that they felt they were on management's 'good side' so the treatment they received was okay, implying that decisions and fairness is often something 'afforded' by management.

Difficult customers also presented a problem for student workers. Managers seem to do little to buffer workers from rude and sometimes abusive customers. They can sometimes be called upon when situations escalate but bad customer reports can negatively affect future work. J.W. described a situation where she regularly had difficult customers:

Because people do yell at you. I'm Chinese and you'd have people speaking to me in Chinese thinking that I must have been born here and

that I don't speak Chinese. Talking about me and saying bigatory (sic) things to me and you'd have to take it in.

Students rarely bring up these problems to managers and instead learn ways to cope. R.O. claimed she gained a great deal of confidence finding ways “to not take the rude behaviour “the customers in her store often displayed.

Health and safety concerns were very real for some of the students interviewed, particularly those in the fast food and grocery industry. J.Y. repeatedly expressed how dangerous he found his fast food restaurant. The floors were incredibly slippery with tight walkways through the kitchen where the risk of slipping near fryers was evident. J.Y. related that employees tried to make suggestions about how to make the floors safer but franchise owners would not take up any of the suggestions. As a result of abusive managers and unsafe working conditions J.Y.'s student job was rewarding at the beginning but after a few months he felt:

In the beginning I was looking forward to work. At the point I quit I was looking forward to going home.

R.O. has been injured twice on the job and commented that many likely do not understand the dangers posed by working in a grocery store. She did receive compensation for the time she lost due to injuries suffered on the job, likely because she is one of the few students working in a unionized environment. Three out of the 10 students did confirm that they had received some level of health and safety training. Most participants remembered that it was the

Workplace Hazardous Materials Information Systems (WHMIS) training. For the most part they felt the training was irrelevant as it involved substances they never came into contact with while failing to address occupational health and safety issues they felt they did face.

This next section looks at some further findings from the McMaster Work and Health Survey. The data was used to compare part-time working students, the vast majority of students surveyed, with non-student part-time workers. The specific comparison was used to compare two groups with relatively similar ‘places’ in the labour market to see how their attitudes towards work differed. One of the questions drawn upon queried how workers believe bringing up an employment or health and safety issue may affect future work. In addition questions from the survey that try to get at how much ‘influence’ workers feel they have in their workplaces were also analysed.

The students surveyed for the McMaster Work and Health Survey provide insights into a more general account of health and safety and employment rights issues. In part, students working part-time identify a more vulnerable position vis-à-vis health and safety than other non-student part-time workers. Over 10 percent more working students surveyed believe that raising a health and safety concern would negatively affect future employment (Table 1.3). This table indicates that students are concerned about these types of issues but feel advocating for better conditions may jeopardize their employment. Similarly,

with raising employment rights, working students are also more likely to believe that speaking out risked their future employment compared to other non-student part-time workers (Table 1.4).

The survey also revealed findings that appear to contradict the vulnerability a certain segment of students feel. Students, when asked if they feel they have influence over the operations at their workplaces, are more likely to answer in the affirmative than non-student part-time workers. For example, 41 per cent of part-time working students believe they can exert some influence over the operations in their workplace, while only 25 per cent of non-student part-time workers feel they have this ability (Table 1.5). Similarly, 44 per cent of part-time student workers believe bringing up a health and safety concern would result in positive action compared to 34 per cent for non-student part-time workers (Table 1.6).

This points to another segment of the student worker population who may perhaps naively, believe that they do have influence in the workplace. More ‘seasoned’ non-student part-time workers are aware that their influence in the workplace may be minimal. However, looking specifically at student workers, a gender difference emerges. Male student workers are more likely to believe that their health and safety concerns will be met with action. Fifty one per cent of male student workers compared to 40 per cent of female students believe that their concerns about health and safety will be listened to (Table 1.7).

From the survey we also learn that part-time student workers enjoy more support at work and in their lives than other part-time workers. They are more likely to answer in the affirmative that they have people they can call on for support at work, co-workers they consider as friends and that they have dependable families. This is likely explained because, as we know, many of the students in the GTA are living with parents or family and can rely on them for both emotional and financial support. Many of the student workplaces are also largely comprised of student workforces, meaning that there are peers to rely on and befriend. Some of the students interviewed identified friends on the job as one of the few positive aspects of their work, claiming that co-workers were what made the job tolerable.

Finding interesting and relevant work in their field of study was extremely rare for the students interviewed. A few are working at the university as research assistants and feel this work was important to their future endeavours. E.M. expressed frustration with the difficulty of even getting internships in her field of study, International Relations. She found that internships wanted students to already have an undergraduate degree even though they were only volunteer positions. Interesting and relevant work in this case required higher qualifications and did not even offer adequate compensation, an indicator that these types of opportunities are few and far between and organizations can require highly qualified candidates for volunteer positions. R.O. faces a tough decision this

summer whether to take a job offered to her by the organization in her field of study. The work is full-time but does not pay as much as her unionized grocery store job. Although the work is clearly in her field she knows she can make more working the summer at the deli counter. As avoiding student debt is her main goal, she is leaning towards staying at the grocery store.

Many of the students also face significant travel time issues. The three-way commute between work, school and home often means that working students in the GTA spend hours each day in transit. Out of the ten students interviewed only one did not live with family and was also the only student who did not have family in the GTA. From the McMaster Work and Health Survey we learn that 70 per cent of those surveyed live with parents; this number may even be higher as some may be living with other relatives, as were a few of the students interviewed, and paying no rent. Most expressed that living at home was not their first choice because of the long commute it often requires, though many expressed gratitude that they could live at home as otherwise they would have trouble affording school. S:L. who has full family support for school and who had lived in residence for the first two years of school and was now back at home reflected on the amount of time the arrangement does afford him.

...I had to cook for myself. Go out and buy it, cook it, eat it and clean up – already 2 hours there. More bills and stuff even though it was a shorter commute. Because I want my grades to be better I will probably stay at home.

Not only does living at home buffer students financially, it also provides support as they attempt to juggle work and school. Most say they try to contribute to housework but acknowledge that their parents do the majority of the work and are understanding of their busy schedules.

Some of the students interviewed also reflected on their summer work experiences. Many who had part-time jobs tried to extend these jobs as much as they could during the summer months. This proved generally impossible for most of the students as part-time workforces dominated their workplaces, with employers who for the most part do not provide full-time work. Juggling more than one job was sometimes the only option for students over the summer.

G.Y. took on three part-time jobs last summer as he attempted to gain full-time employment. He encountered employers that wanted his complete flexibility without the return of full-time hours. One employer told him that he had to quit his other two jobs when he was hired. He managed to be able to juggle the three jobs for about a month but eventually had to quit the fast food job. G.Y. describes his interaction with the manager.

She found out that I was keeping the two other jobs and that I was asking for the weekend off so that I could work at the other job. She then approached me about that and she told me that I should either let the other jobs go or let [this] job go. I made the decision to leave the [fast food] job.

P.G. has also managed to create full-time employment for himself by holding down two jobs. The pizza restaurant has always been clear that they do not

provide full-time hours so he maintains a second job during the weekends cleaning a laboratory.

The interviews and survey data provide a textured picture of student work. For students with full financial support from parents, work, though sometimes demanding, is not essential to their wellbeing. This group of student workers are significantly buffered from the pressures of balancing work and school. Students without parental financial support face difficult decisions about how many hours they can 'afford' to work. The alternative for students who do not want to risk their education is to rely heavily on student loans. Student when they do work face significant time pressure issues, and demands by employers for flexibility often mean students face tremendous stress trying to meet these demands or quit in the hopes of finding a more 'accommodating' job. Tannock sums up the struggle well:

In these and other workplaces (fast food and grocery) time is often a battleground, a site of constant struggle between workers and employers as each group seeks to pursue what are sometimes overlapping, but more often conflicting, sets of interests. Time in the service and retail workplace is valued as both resource and reward, and employers and workers alike continually seek to gain control over how time is to be used as resource at work and how it may be dispensed as reward for work (2003:184).

These interviews tell us that employment for many students is extremely important and the conditions they face are difficult. Many want a decent income and predictable or stable hours so they can both contribute to their education and

plan their study schedules. Though employers want students because they are often willing to work irregular and odd hours, the complete flexibility demanded can be too much for students. If students were to meet employer demands for their time they would risk jeopardizing their education. The time battleground appears set to continue as employer demands for flexibility grow and students are increasingly feeling pressure to work.

Neo-Liberal Restructuring

Over the past two decades labour market conditions for students have deteriorated while tuition levels have risen dramatically. Behind these changes lies a backdrop of neo-liberal restructuring. On the one hand, there has been a move to restructure the labour market to introduce more flexible forms of employment while, on the other hand, there has been a significant shift in the funding of public services, namely post-secondary education. This section will briefly explore some of the literature associated with neo-liberal restructuring and begin to tease out how neo-liberal restructuring has affected and continues to affect working students.

In short, in the 1990's a "more unified and intellectually coherent policy agenda" (Stanford & Vosko, 2004:11) emerged that worked to move responsibilities out of the hands of the state, families and individuals and into the private sphere of the market (Burke et al., 2000: 11). This is clear in the area of post-secondary education as governments continue to withdraw funding, and download the cost of obtaining an education onto students and families. The dismantling of the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) in the 1990's signalled a major change to federal social policy (National Council of Welfare, 1995). CAP was replaced with the new and reduced Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST) in 1995. This move signalled a shift away from the practice of provincial and

federal cost sharing. The three large policy areas affected were in the area of social assistance, healthcare and post-secondary education. In contrast with the 50/50 CAP, the CHST is considered a 'block funding' arrangement with fewer 'strings' attached.

In place of the Canada Assistance Plan would be a loose financial arrangement called "block funding" that would cover Medicare and post-secondary education as well as welfare and social services. Substantial cuts in federal financial support for all these programs are an essential feature of the new arrangement (Ibid: 1).

A trend towards the divestment of federal spending in programs areas such as post-secondary education has continued to the present. The 2004 federal budget contained moderate measures aimed at addressing accessibility issues for low-income students. The budget included the provision of learning bonds, modest changes to the Canada Student Loan Program and introduced first-year grants for low-income students (de Broucker, 2005). Although these programs can provide some relief, it has come about after years of reduced transfer payments and escalating tuition in provinces such as Ontario. As the de Broucker study notes, over the last number of years most government expenditures in the area of post-secondary education have been largely targeted toward tax credits. This reorganization of funding through tax credits is considered a highly regressive form of social policy, providing a disproportionate share of benefits to families with higher incomes.

Major shifts in funding formulas for post-secondary education have also been coupled with the spread of contingent work in many sectors of the economy, particularly those service sectors where student workers are concentrated (Lowe, 2001). Restructuring the labour market to introduce more flexible forms of employment has gained momentum in recent decades and has led to an increase in precarious forms of employment. The trend began to emerge in the 1980's when from 1980-88 half of all new jobs differed from the traditional model or what Vosko refers to as the Standard Employment Relationship (SER) (Vosko, 2000). Workers are now more likely to juggle multiple jobs and have temporary and/or part-time arrangements, while self-employment is on the rise. This trend has continued into the present and is visible when we examine the fate of new hires. In 1989 11 per cent were temporary; by 2004 that number has jumped to 21 per cent (Morissette and Johnson, 2005). Shrouded in the argument that employment flexibility is necessary for global competitiveness, increasingly employers are arguing that they need the ability to respond quickly and without penalty.

Neo-liberal restructuring and its associated labour market reforms are often traced back to the 1995 OECD *Job Study*. These papers put forth a series of recommendations aimed at encouraging labour market flexibility and decreasing income security programs. One of the specifics found in this study is the call for the “de facto expansion of precarious employment”. This is an attempt to remove perceived labour market ‘rigidities’ (Stanford & Vosko, 2004). McBride and

Williams caution on the degree to which the OECD *Job Study* recommendations have been adopted, reporting that “convergence has been slow to develop” (2001: 283). Canada is in fact below average compared to other OECD countries in relation to the number of measures adopted. Nevertheless, this is an attempt by proponents of neo-liberalism at ‘moral suasion’. The Canadian government has issued its own series of policy papers geared towards increasing labour market flexibility and the elimination of rigidities such as Unemployment Insurance (U.I.) and other social programs (Stanford, 1995). The *Globe and Mail* in 1994 reiterated the government’s position by declaring in an editorial that “rigidities prevent labour markets from doing their job, which is to see that all available labour is employed in its best use” (Ibid: 131). What we can come to understand at minimum is that after two decades of neo-liberal restructuring “[t]he industrial relations playing field has been tilted and structured in a more business-friendly manner” (Gindin & Stanford, 2003: 428).

Burke and Shields’ conceptualization of social exclusion and underemployment can also help shed further light on how the quality of student jobs is worsened under the current climate of restructuring. They used tools of analysis such as structural exclusion and vulnerability index to describe a labour market characterised by ‘poor job growth’ (2000). Their analysis demonstrates that a lowering of the unemployment rate does not necessarily mean that workers are fairing better, as job quality may be low and rates of vulnerability high. Burke

and Shields draw upon the Ryerson Social Reporting Network to take into account social exclusion estimates, such as the rate of involuntary part-time and the number of marginal own-account self-employed and marginal temporary workers (those making \$10/hour or less). When these factors are considered a different picture of ‘unemployment’ or ‘social exclusion’ arises. Unemployment coupled with ‘underemployment’ levels can be up to two and one half times higher than more restrictive unemployment measurements (Ibid).

Precarious work has been a characteristic of capitalist economies since their inception, but much of the struggle in the early twentieth century, between labour and capital, fought to move towards a SER (Lewchuk et al, 2003). Youth and women are indeed segments of the labour market that have long experienced insecure and irregular forms of work (Pollert, 1988). In the 1980’s when the lower end of the labour market experienced significant levels of growth, employers took advantage of student labour to fill a wide variety of low paid part-time jobs (Marquardt, 1998). A clear link exists between a move towards neo-liberal restructuring with the introduction of more flexible forms of employment, the withdrawal of the state in the area of post-secondary education and deteriorating conditions for student workers. An argument can thus begin to be formulated that neo liberal restructuring has indeed affected this group of workers.

Public Policy Discussion

Public policy shapes the lives of working students in a number of particular ways. Decisions about how to regulate the labour market, including minimum wage laws, can have profound effects on their standard of living. This section will explore public policy directions such as minimum wage setting. It will also explore briefly a few policy solutions that could help alleviate some of the pressure working students feel in the current climate.

Lowering the minimum wage is often put forward as a solution to youth unemployment. Institutes like the Conference Board of Canada are often behind this policy thrust; they suggest wage setting, presumably to maintain a lower level of wages to encourage both public and private sector employment opportunities (Kitagawa, 2002). As a market-based solution, this ‘proposes’ to create more employment, as some of the ‘rigidities’ of the labour market would be removed. Provinces such as British Columbia have introduced these types of neo-liberal policy suggestions. They have reduced minimum wages for “new entrants” into the labour market. Since 2001 ‘new’ workers are paid \$6 for the first 500 hours of work rather than the standard \$8 minimum. The ‘rationale’ put forward is that employers are required to ‘front’ an investment and train these new hires. From what we know of student jobs, many are in retail, hospitality and food services

where the need for and access to training is minimal, so this rationale is predicated on false assumptions. Instead of generating more jobs, the more likely outcome would be a worsening of the working conditions and economic prospects for student and youth workers.

In France we have seen over recent months an attempt by the state government to introduce neo-liberal labour market reforms. The French government tried to remove labour market rigidities by weakening many of the hard-fought labour standards for the newest members of the labour market. Instead of attacking the workforce as a whole the French government likely thought they could begin to loosen standards by first targeting a marginalized group of workers, youth and students. The proposed legislation was an attempt to lay the groundwork for a French labour market without the protections and securities that defined its earlier existence. The reaction from French students and eventually organized labour was profound. Students were out on the streets of Paris with a clear message against the introduction of precarious forms of labour. These protests highlighted the tendencies of governments to propose solutions to youth unemployment that trade away their access to good quality jobs. The French students managed to stall the government's introduction of the proposed legislation, though it can be assumed that this will be a policy battle-ground in France and indeed Canada in the years to come.

Not only are governments attempting to weaken labour standards with students often experiencing the worst of the change, but the limited amount of legislation that is addressing issues of precarious work can often exempt students. For example, Bill 32, The Labour Standards Amendment Act put forward by the Saskatchewan government in the mid 1990's, worked to address scheduling and access to benefit issues for part-time workers. A small step in the right direction, it put forward provisions requiring amongst other things, one week's notice of work schedules changes and an "additional hours of work" provision, which would allow part-timers to pick up more hours when they became available (Broad, 1997). It also required that employers provide equal benefits to part-time workers who work over 15 hours a week. Students were exempt from this last provision on the 'rationale' that they were only working for extra money (Ibid). Not only is public policy often regressive towards young student workers by cheapening their labour but also, they are often left out of legislation that could benefit them. A two-tier policy agenda, which leaves young and student workers behind is unfortunately too often the direction put forward.

Tuition was consistently addressed as a major issue for the working students profiled in the study. With deregulation in many of the programs considered professional, tuition for these students is skyrocketing, while overall undergraduate tuition is steadily increasing. Access to a post-secondary education for students from a range of incomes levels risks becoming threatened. Research

has found that in 1986 there was less than a one per cent participation rate difference between low and middle-income students; however, by 1994 this gap had grown seven percentage points larger (Hemingway et al., 2004).

Working while in school also lengthens the time spent in school and consequently the costs students and families have to incur; another ‘catch-22’ students face when making the decision whether to work. The Canadian University Survey Consortium (CUSC) found that 70 per cent of students would complete their education faster if they did not have to work. Twenty per cent of those surveyed reported that they had interrupted their studies for employment, financial and other reasons. Escalating tuition means that students are responding by working more hours while in school, incurring more debt and relying more heavily on family for support. At the rate presently followed, accessibility is also seriously threatened. Lower or eliminating tuition would clearly be the best policy solution for students and families in Canada. Restoring federal transfer payment levels, slashed with the elimination of CAP, are key to halting the rising levels of tuition experienced by Ontario students.

Conclusion

This study began by asking whether the jobs available to students pose a threat to the education they are working to pursue. The interviews show a picture of student work that is often coupled with a high degree of scheduling uncertainty. Students are scheduled for short shifts, schedules vary from week to week and employers are not always sympathetic to school demands. Time, as Tannock points out, is indeed a 'battleground'. With the deterioration of the summer job market, instead of gaining full-time employment during the summer, students can often only find part-time work or have to juggle multiple jobs to 'fashion' full-time hours. This means that less income is generated during the summer and students have to rely more on their year-round employment. More research should be done on the student summer job market and why it has worsened to the degree it has in recent years. One can assume that some of the same reasons the overall student job market has deteriorated would apply: in short, the proliferation of jobs in the retail, hospitality and food service industry with their demand for part-time workers coupled with an overall shift in labour relations in favour of employer demands for flexibility. Questions could also be raised to the degree to which governments have withdrawn from youth summer employment programs that may have provide incentives to employers to hire students in the past.

This study also begins to briefly outline a link between neo-liberal restructuring over the past two decades, and a worsening of conditions for student

workers. Neo-liberalism is manifested in both a shift in social policy towards the downloading of costs in the area of post-secondary education, and the introduction of more precarious forms of employment into the labour market.

With the escalating cost of tuition, the pressure to work is felt by many students in the GTA. Some of the students profiled for this study choose to work over 20 hours a week, putting their school pursuits in some jeopardy, while others decide to work minimum hours and rely heavily on OSAP. Unfortunately OSAP has become the support system for many post-secondary students, rather than an active state investing in young people's futures. The degree to which the debt burden affects student's future labour market experiences is another worthy area for further study.

It is the hope that this project can begin to dismantle some of the misconceptions around student work. Students want to be able to count on the income they earn; for many students it is a major source of funding for their education. Working conditions should also not be overlooked; the idea that these jobs are only temporary allows employers to exploit student labour in a way that should not be considered acceptable. Public policy is too often shaped by these misconceptions and age discrimination is apparent in policy initiatives that address youth and student labour market issues. Two-tier minimum wages should be strongly opposed, regulatory frameworks developed to protect precarious workers, such as Bill 32 in Saskatchewan, should not exclude student workers and

tuition should be eliminated or at the very least capped. Student workers need to be seen by policy makers as ‘real workers’ entitled to decent wages and fair conditions. This research aims to help situate an understanding of the lives of working students by shedding particular light on to their working conditions. It is hoped that this research can and will be used to pressure governments, policy markers, educators, employers and unions to improve the conditions of working students.

List of Tables

Table 1.1

Total income from paid employment over the last 12 months for full time students, before taxes and deductions.

INCOME FROM WORK	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative
<10000	372	59.42	59.42
10-19999	129	20.61	80.03
20-29999	70	11.18	91.21
30-39999	34	5.43	96.65
40-49999	11	1.76	98.40
50-59999	4	0.64	99.04
=>60000	6	0.96	100.00
Total	626	100.00	

Table 1.2

Average amount of paid hours worked by full time students per week.

HOURS PER WEEK WORKED LAST MONTH	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
<=10	157	25.12	25.12
11-20	203	32.48	57.60
21-30	99	15.84	73.44
31-40	130	20.80	94.24
>40	36	5.76	100.00
Total	625	100.00	

Table 1.3

Participants are asked whether raising a health and safety concern will negatively impact future employment. Table compares responses given by part-time student workers and part-time non-student workers.

FULL-TIME STUDENT	RAISING H&S CONCERN NEGATIVELY AFFECT FUTURE EMPLOYMENT		Total
	NO	YES	
NO	206 91.56%	19 8.44%	225 100.00
YES	229 81.49%	52 18.51%	281 100.00
Total	435 85.97%	71 14.03%	506 100.00

Table 1.4

Participants are asked whether raising an employment right will negatively impact future employment. Table compares responses given by part-time student workers and part-time non-student workers.

FULL-TIME STUDENT	RAISING EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS CONCERN NEGATIVELY AFFECT FUTURE EMPLOYMENT		Total
	NO	YES	
NO	177 78.67%	48 21.33%	225 100.00
YES	199 70.82%	82 29.18%	281 100.00
Total	376 74.31%	130 25.69%	506 100.00

Table 1.5

Participants are asked whether they believe they can influence operations at their workplace(s). Table compares responses given by part-time student workers and part-time non-student workers.

FULL-TIME STUDENT	CAN INFLUENCE OPERATIONS AT LEAST SOME		Total
	NO	YES	
NO	171 75.00	57 25.00	228 100.00
YES	163 58.21	117 41.79	280 100.00
Total	334 65.75	174 34.25	508 100.00

Table 1.6

Participants are asked whether raising a health and safety concern will result in change at least half of the time. Table compares responses given by part-time student workers and part-time non-student workers.

FULL-TIME STUDENT	RAISING H&S WILL LEAD TO CHANGE AT LEAST HALF THE TIME		Total
	NO	YES	
NO	151 66.23	77 33.77	228 100.00
YES	157 56.07	123 43.93	280 100.00
Total	308 60.63	200 39.37	508 100.00

Table 1.7

Table compares male and female working students when asked if raising a health and safety concern will lead to change at least half of the time.

SEX	RAISING H&S WILL LEAD TO CHANGE AT LEAST HALF THE TIME		Total
	NO	YES	
MALE	174 48.60	184 51.40	358 100.00
FEMALE	160 59.70	108 40.30	268 100.00
Total	334 53.35	292 46.65	626 100.00

(Source for all Tables: McMaster Work and Health Survey, 2006)

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Working Students Interview Participants

- S.L. Position: Life Guard
 Age: 20
 Sex: Male
 Date: May 16, 2006
- E.M. Position: Retail Sales Clerk
 Age: 19
 Sex: Female
 Date: May 17, 2006
- D.O. Position: Server, major coffee chain
 Age: 19
 Sex: Male
 Date May 18, 2006
- J.W.
clerk Position: Server, major coffee chain - previously grocery store

 Age: 19
 Sex: Female
 Date: May 19, 2006
- G.Y. Position: Youth Leader
 Age: 20
 Sex: Male
 Date: May 19, 2006
- J.Y.
food Position: Currently unemployed - previously server, major fast
 chain
 Age: 19
 Sex: Male
 Date: May 23, 2006
- B.L. Position: Co-op placement in an insurance firm
 Age: 21
 Sex: Male
 Date: May 23, 2006

R.O. Position: Grocery Store Clerk
 Age: 21
 Sex: Female
 Date: June 9, 2006

T.G. Position: Currently unemployed - previously, telephone solicitor
 Age: 20
 Sex: Female
 Date: June 13, 2006

P.G. Position: Server, major pizza chain and Janitor
 Age: 21
 Sex: Male
 Date: June 13, 2006

Appendix A

Interview Guide

Researcher: Emily Watkins

A: Background

Tell me a little bit about your work:

What does your usual week look like? (how many hours are you working, how many of hours of class, how many hours spent studying, other commitments/responsibilities).

What type of work do you do?

Are there aspects of your work that you like/dislike?

B Balancing Work and School

I am interested in understanding the issues facing working students.

What are some of the reasons why you are working while in school? (financial, extra work experience).

What is the main source of your income for school – how does this shape your decisions around work?

Does your job ever interfere with your studies? (i.e. missed classes, late assignments)

Have you adjusted your class load due to the need to work?

C: Working conditions and the Employment Relationship

In the survey you identified that you worked on a casual, temporary, part-time and/or self-employed basis.

Has your job changed since completing the survey?

How do some of the insecurities you've identified in the survey affect you?

Do you have control over your schedule?

Does your schedule affect your school commitments? How?

Do you often have to find other employees to cover shifts for you?

Is your employer sympathetic and/or supportive of your school commitments?

Does the fact that you are a student affect the way you are treated at work?

Do you have a good relationship with your co-workers? Any tensions because you are a student?

Do you have sufficient hours, would you prefer more?

Are you paid on time and regularly?

How much do you make an hour?

Would you prefer more secure work?

Would more secure work allow you to focus more on your studies?

Does your student loan affect the type of work you take – how much you are willing to take on?

Do you find your work stressful? What stresses you out about your job? (boss, customers, other life balances you are trying to juggle)

Have you ever seen or have you experienced discrimination or harassment at your workplace?

D: Other Life Pressures

If you quit the job you have now how likely do you think it would be that you could find another job quickly enough to meet your financial needs?

Have you ever dropped out of school or considered leaving because of financial reasons?

After work and school how much time do you have for other activities? (sports, social life, family)

Do you live close to your work and school? Do you live with your parents or on your own?

If lives at home: when do you see yourself moving out on your own? What are some of the reasons you have chosen to stay at home?

E: Future

The work you've had as a student do you see it as helping you get ahead in the job market in the future? How?

Has your paid employment been related at all to your studies? Or, has it influence what direction you are taking in your studies?

Going to school can be expensive to what extent does this motivate your decision to work? Are there ever things at work you accept because you need the money for your education?

If participant predicts a debt: upon completion of your degree, what do estimate the amount of your debt to be?

What type of work do you hope to obtain after your schooling is complete?

Do you feel hopeful you'll be able to find that type of work?

We know that employers are asking for more flexibility from workers, how do you see this affecting you?

You've been working for a while now, how has this changed your views of the labour market and you as a worker?

Appendix B

Consent to Participate in the Working Student Study

This form is requesting your consent to participate in a study on working students conducted by Emily Watkins, a Master's Student in the Labour Studies Program at McMaster University. This study explores issues facing working students in the GTA. Particularly how juggling paid employment affects a student's ability to pursue their post-secondary education.

This is an independent research project and a \$25.00 honorarium will be paid to interview participants.

Purpose:

- Investigate the issues facing working students, especially those in precarious employment relationships.
- Use the results to raise awareness around the issues facing working students and attempt to improve their working conditions.
- Make public the final results of the study.

Procedure:

- You will be asked to participate in an interview about your work and school pursuits. This should take about an hour and a half to complete.
- The discussion will be recorded.

Risks and benefits:

- Although you are not likely to benefit personally from the interview, what we learn may benefit others in the future.

- If you feel embarrassed to discuss, for example, your financial situation or distressed about answering questions about the challenges of balancing work and school, please feel free to ask the interviewer to skip to another question. You are not obliged to answer any question you uncomfortable with.

Privacy and confidentiality:

- All the information you provide will be treated as strictly confidential.
- We will use data only in ways that ensure you cannot be identified.

Refusal or withdrawal:

- Your participation in this study is voluntary.
- You may withdraw at any time without adverse consequence
- **If you decide to withdraw from the study, please notify the Researcher (see below). If you withdraw, all your information will be destroyed.**

More information: If you have any questions, or would like a final copy of the study and/or a summary of results, contact:

Emily Watkins, MA Student

Labour Studies Programme, McMaster University

Phone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 24692

Email: watkinec@mcmaster.ca

Project Supervisor:

Professor Wayne Lewchuk

Labour Studies Department, McMaster University

Phone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 27293

Email: lewchuk@mcmaster.ca

Research ethics: The McMaster Research Ethics Board has approved this project. If you have questions regarding the research ethics of this study, contact:

McMaster University Research Ethics Board

Office of Research Services, McMaster University

905-525-9140 ext. 23142, ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

I have read the consent form and understand the conditions about participation. I agree to complete the interview. I also acknowledge that I have received a copy of the consent form.

Name (please print):

Signature:

Date:

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR TIME AND HELP!

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