

# Make your PhD outcomes transparent and be proud of where your graduates end up

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UBC dataset on PhD outcomes holds key for prospective graduate students to make an informed choice about obtaining PhD training.

Last week, I received an email from my PhD alma mater UBC and instead of a request for donations or an invitation to an event with the expectation of soliciting a donation later, I was treated to a new dataset emerging from the west coast. UBC has collated responses from its PhD graduates between 2005 and 2013 (myself included!) into an [outcomes website and document](#). This is a great move for a number of reasons, but perhaps most importantly, it holds the key for prospective graduate students to make an informed choice about obtaining PhD training – a comprehensive set of data showing what those who have come before you have done.

Of the 3,800+ students who graduated with doctoral degrees, this study managed to collect data (in some form or another) from 91 percent of its graduates – laudable by any survey standard. Less than two percent of graduates find themselves unemployed and seeking work. A significant number of graduates found themselves in research intensive faculty positions (16-20 percent of those who graduated three to five years ago and up to 34 percent for those graduating 11 years ago) which is a fair bit higher than the 20 percent number often bandied about, but this is likely reflective of UBC's relative standing in the university world. A further nine percent held teaching-intensive faculty positions.

Another interesting set of statistics reported was where these graduates made their home – 60 percent stayed in Canada with 41 percent staying in British Columbia (not a ridiculous brain drain after all!). Seventy-five percent of Canadian-born graduates remained in Canada and presumably at least some of those who currently find themselves abroad will return in the future.

Perhaps the most informative section for prospective students is the non-academic positions that they could end up in – everyone knows a PhD student can become a professor, but what else can they do? The private sector employers were particularly interesting – Google snapped up 23 UBC doctors while STEMCELL Technologies was right behind them with 21 (strong showing from a BC-based biotechnology company!). Other employers were in the tech industry (IBM, Microsoft, Intel, etc) and biomedical sciences (AstraZeneca, Genentech, and Zymeworks, the latter being another BC-based biotech) and a long tail of companies employing one to five PhD graduates. The public sector jobs were less diverse with many ending up in local health authorities or provincial/federal government posts. Just over three percent of graduates have started their own company, but this number would be expected to rise as the number of years post-PhD gets longer.

What is UBC doing with all of the information? The most useful thing is making the data (warts and all) completely transparent and UBC has done exactly this – you can click through every discipline and ask who employs UBC graduates. For example, I now know that I am one of six people with a UBC PhD working at the university of Cambridge and that 46 percent of those in my PhD program (genetics) find themselves in higher education and 34 percent in the private sector. Any prospective student could do the same for programs they are considering, asking questions like “which program gives me the best chance of working for the federal government compared to a biotech company?”

To all other universities – replicate this tool. Make your outcomes transparent and be proud of where your graduates end up. Give your current and prospective students something to think about as they consider or undertake training. As for UBC – how else are they leading the field? As of now, the most impressive project is the [Public Scholars Initiative](#) which is set up to “support doctoral pathways that encourage positive social contribution” – sounds

amazing, right? We'll see where it goes, but what a wonderful way to view its PhD programs – the products are the people, not the data or the research. Well done UBC, well done.