

Getting Ready for the Real World:
Final-Year Students and Their Virtual Recruitment Event Experiences

Celia Johnston

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By: Celia Johnston

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Signed by the final examining committee:

Dr. Saul Carliner Chair

Dr. Julie Corrigan Examiner

Dr. Giuliana Cucinelli Examiner

Dr. Saul Carliner Thesis Supervisor(s)

Thesis Supervisor(s)

Approved by _____
Dr. Saul Carliner Chair of Department or Graduate Program Director

Dr. Pascale Sicotte Dean of Faculty of Arts and Science

Abstract

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Celia Johnston

Research problem:

This study explores the experiences and perceptions of final-year undergraduate business students at a comprehensive university in central Canada regarding virtual recruitment events and their role in networking and advancing career opportunities for soon-to-be graduates.

Although virtual recruitment events (activities that occur online to bring together employers and job seekers) have become more common since the COVID-19 pandemic, little research has focused on the student perspective of these events.

Research questions:

1. What are the expectations and perceptions of university students regarding networking and advancing their job search?
2. What are the expectations and perceptions of university students regarding virtual recruitment events?
3. How do university students perceive the relationships between virtual and in-person events?
 - a. Are virtual events seen as complementing or replacing in-person events?
 - b. What are the strengths and limitations of virtual recruitment events?
4. How do virtual events support university students in forming social networks necessary for effective career advancement?

Literature review:

Social Network Theory and Weak-Tie Network Theory provide a foundation for understanding how relationships influence job search outcomes, with an emphasis on weak-tie (casual, infrequent) connections in accessing new opportunities. Genre theory helps explain how students interpret and engage with recruitment events based on familiar communication norms. Virtual events, while offering accessibility benefits to attendees, raise concerns about engagement and connection. Career Services play a key role in organizing these events, preparing students, and adapting formats to meet evolving needs.

Methodology:

This qualitative study used a collective case study approach. Five final-year undergraduate business students or recent graduates from a comprehensive university in central Canada were selected through purposive sampling. They were interviewed using semi-structured interviews, which were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step method.

Results and Conclusions:

The findings suggest that students view networking as critical to job search success and career advancement. Although virtual recruitment events offer convenience and accessibility, participants agreed that they complement, but do not replace, in-person events. Virtual events are useful for gathering information, but students rely more on in-person experiences to build strong professional relationships. Additionally, the findings suggest that networking is a skill developed through practice, that intentional efforts made by Career Services and recruiters can support students in building their professional networks.

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I would like to dedicate this thesis to my son, Theodore.

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Balancing full-time work, postpartum recovery, and life's unexpected twists made this thesis journey longer and harder than I anticipated. I am especially grateful to my colleagues who supported me and allowed me the time and space I needed to focus on completing this important milestone. And to my friends and family, especially my husband, Christopher, and my parents, thank you for giving me the strength, patience, and encouragement to keep going.

I have so much admiration for everyone who takes on the challenge of writing a thesis, and even more gratitude for the people who lift us up along the way.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

We've all been there – whether you were looking for your first job or a new opportunity, the job search process can be a complex, unpredictable, and demanding process. As we dive into the stories of Jessica, Divya, and Billy, take a moment to reflect on your own experiences and consider how you would have navigated these unique situations.

Jessica aims to pursue a career in investment banking (a type of banking that manages large, complex financial transactions such as mergers, acquisitions, initial public offerings (IPO), and sales of businesses). She knows the market in Canada is highly competitive so she visits her university career centre (a university service that helps students and alumni with job searches, resumes, interviews, and networking) to learn more about the industry and how she could increase her chances of employment. Advised by the career centre to participate in recruitment events, such as job fairs and networking sessions, she registers for the next one focused on investment banking. To prepare, she polishes her Curriculum Vitae (CV), researches the market, puts on her best professional outfit, and arrives 10 minutes early for the event. She listens in on the presentation and then approaches the representatives to introduce herself and ask questions. Before the event ends, she ensures to request their business cards and sends a follow-up email within 24 hours thanking them for their time and reinforcing her interest in joining the firm in the future.

Divya traveled from India to complete her Bachelor of Commerce with a major in Business Technology Management. She knows that business and information technology skills are in high demand and wants to increase her chances of employment. While in her first year, her university career centre visits her class to present their services, and how an internship (short-term work placement that provides students or recent graduates with practical work experience) would be a great way to gain Canadian work experience and increase her chances of full-time employment

in Canada post-graduation. While she is preparing to attend her first recruitment event, the university goes remote due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the event changes to a virtual format. The career centre encourages students to still dress professionally and ensure they attend remotely from a quiet space. She logs in, turns on her camera, listens to the presentation, and participates in the breakout room networking portion. She scans the QR code encouraging students to submit their CV and thanks the representatives for their time.

Billy is proud to be the first in his family to get a university degree. While in university, he mostly kept to himself as he had to work his way through his studies and did not have much time to socialize. In the last year of his degree, he realizes that he has no idea what his next step is after graduation. He learns of a virtual Career Fair being hosted by his university career centre and registers for the event. He does not know what to expect so he reaches out to the career centre who provides him with a helpful list of tips and tricks. He identifies the top 5 companies that he is hoping to speak with and books a 1:1 speed networking session with a recruiter from each company. He researches companies, their opportunities, and their cultures. He books a study room at the university and sets up his computer where there are no distractions behind him. He logs in to meet with each recruiter, asks a few questions, and ends every meeting by asking to connect on LinkedIn. He ensures to send thank you messages when sending his requests to connect.

The fictional stories of Jessica, Divya, and Billy serve to illustrate a few examples of experiences students encounter during their participation in university recruitment activities. Despite the support provided by career centres, each student's recruitment journey is unique and is shaped by their individual backgrounds, aspirations, experiences, and challenges. While the

event format could be similar, what students expect and the way that they prepare, perceive, and experience the events could be quite different which is what this study will explore.

According to Dr. Anthony Carnevale, director and research professor at the Georgetown University Centre on Education and the Workforce, the demand for postsecondary education is rising across industries. By 2031, he estimates that 72 percent of jobs will require it as a qualification (Carnevale, 2023). Business degrees remain among the most in-demand due to their versatility and relevance across industries.

While the demand for postsecondary education remains strong, the transition from graduation to employment is not guaranteed. Recent data show that Canadian youth are graduating into one of the most difficult job markets in decades, with the highest unemployment rates among those aged 15 to 24 since the mid-1990s (Benchetrit, 2025). Economic uncertainty, increased competition, and the evolving workforce demands are making it harder for young graduates to secure roles in their fields. These challenges highlight the importance of understanding how students engage in recruitment and networking activities as part of their career development.

To support students in navigating this evolving job market, universities offer Career Services. This service, typically located on campus, helps students with various aspects of their professional growth such as counseling, interviewing assistance, resume assistance, and recruitment events (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014).

Recruitment events, such as job fairs and networking sessions, play a crucial role in connecting students with potential employers and job prospects. These events offer insights into company culture, job openings, and allow students to build relationships with industry professionals. Building a network, which involves building and maintaining these professional relationships, is especially important, as research shows that 80% of jobs are filled through

networks and 70% of jobs are never publicly advertised (Nawej, 2022), implying that they go to in-network candidates.

The recruitment and networking landscape has changed significantly due to COVID-19 pandemic and technological advancements (Meyer, et al., 2021). The emergence of virtual meeting software such as Zoom, Google Meet, Teams, and WebEx, and virtual event management platforms such as vFairs, Hopin, GoToWebinar, and Career Fair Plus, provide a variety of opportunities for students and employers to connect, facilitating networking, job search, and professional development (Green et al., 2021).

Many universities and organizations tried out different formats to remain connected, engaging, and interactive during the pandemic (Meyer et al., 2021). The lockdown in March 2020, introduced to help slow the spread of COVID-19, caused Career Services to transform their services to a virtual format. Examples of activities shifted to virtual included career fairs, online panel Q&As highlighting several different employers, 1:1 speed networking, company-specific webinars, and career workshops. While many students and universities have welcomed the onset of virtual activities, many agree that it does not fully replace human interactions that characterize campus life (Green et al., 2021). More research is required to understand whether virtual events are considered a complement or substitute for traditional face-to-face recruitment events.

Virtual events offer a variety of advantages including time saving and greater flexibility, increase accessibility options (e.g., subtitles in different languages, option to increase text size, removal of physical barriers), elimination of travel expenses and accommodation, and the ability to attract a larger audience around the world (Scarlat et al., 2020). However, it is important to note that they also present a few challenges. They may lack privacy controls, require a financial

investment for hardware, software, and online connection, higher distractions in one's remote location, and information overload to name a few (Scarlat et al., 2020).

Ultimately, employers and Career Services measure the success of a virtual event with diverse metrics including the total number of attendees, number of CVs or applications received, cost-per-hire (how many hires came from this event vs. the cost of participating in the event), and LinkedIn connection requests (Genßler, 2023). However, little is known from the student perspective and how it affects their job search experiences.

To address this knowledge gap, this study aims to explore final-year university students' (those with 30 credits remaining in their studies or less) experiences, perceptions, and expectations regarding virtual recruitment events at universities in Central Canada. By focusing on this specific group, I aim to get a better understanding of how university students navigate networking and recruitment in the digital age. These findings will help to inform Career Services and recruiters seeking to improve the effectiveness of their recruitment activities and efforts, and their support of university student job search.

The following research questions will be addressed:

1. What are the expectations and perceptions of university students regarding networking and advancing their job search?
2. What are the expectations and perceptions of university students regarding virtual recruitment events?
3. How do university students perceive the relationships between virtual and in-person events?
 - a. Are virtual events seen as complementing or replacing in-person events?
 - b. What are the strengths and limitations of virtual recruitment events?

4. How do virtual events support university students in forming social networks necessary for effective career advancement?

This thesis will explore the virtual recruitment event experiences of final-year university students. The next chapter situates the study in the existing literature. Chapter Three outlines the research methodology, including how participants were selected, how data was collected and analyzed, and how credibility and trustworthiness were assured. Chapter Four presents the participant profiles. Chapter Five provides a cross-case analysis of the themes that emerged. Finally, Chapter Six discusses the study's conclusions, implications, and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter situates the study in the literature. It first provides an overview of the theoretical frameworks and models that underline the study, including Social Network Theory and Weak-Tie Network Theory, and then summarizes previous findings about in-person and virtual event formats from previous studies.

How Literature Was Selected for the Review

The literature selection process began by conducting preliminary searches in academic databases such as Google Scholar, Academic Search Complete (EBSCOhost), and Education Source. Keywords used included: virtual recruitment, job search, career event, networking, and professional networking events.

The exclusion criteria included any results focused on graduate student recruitment (universities seeking to recruit for graduate-level programs). In addition, focus was applied to studies that were published within the last 10 years unless they were grounded in theory.

When a relevant study was identified, secondary reference searching was conducted by reviewing the references cited within the study. This helped to dive deeper into the research by identifying ideas or subtopics that were related, which helped to expand the understanding of the topic

Social Network Theory

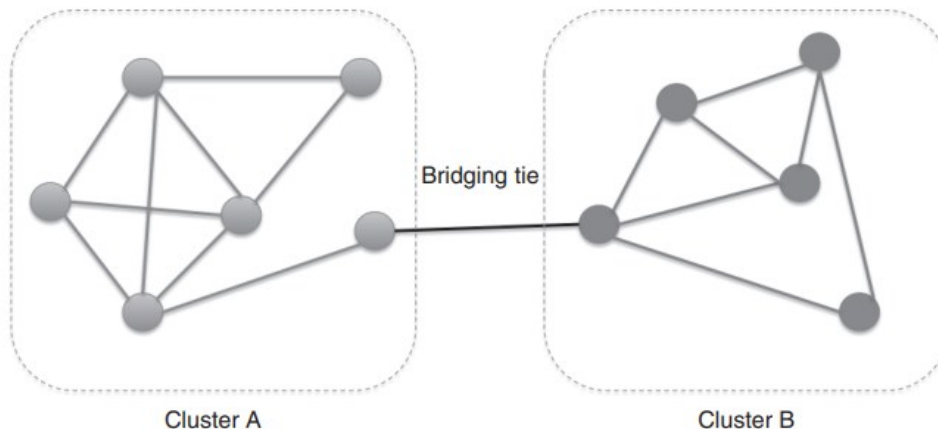
Understanding social network theory is important in the context of virtual recruitment events because these events are not just about connecting students with job opportunities; they are also about building relationships and expanding one's professional network. Social network theory is the study of relationships between people, their interactions, and how information gets transmitted between these individuals (Brass, Galaskiewicz, Greve, & Tsai, 2004).

Research has found that strong and diverse social networks are associated with numerous benefits, including increased innovation, work attitudes, job performance, and finding employment (Brass, Galaskiewicz, Greve, & Tsai, 2004). Central to the social network theory are centrality measures aimed to identify one's social reach, influence, and power: degree, betweenness, and closeness (Freeman, Roeder, & Mulholland, 1979).

- Degree centrality measures the number of links in one's network. This provides insight on one's popularity and prominence within their network.
- Betweenness centrality measures the frequency of which an individual serves as the connector of networks, also known as a bridge. This individual connects groups that would otherwise be unconnected (see Figure 1).
- Closeness centrality measures how close an individual is to all the contacts within their network. The closer they are, the faster and more impactful a message would transmit (Liu, Sidhu, Beacom, & Valente, 2017).

Figure 1

Bridging ties (Liu et al., 2017)



Robert Putnam, an American political scientist, theorized that social networks contain value for individuals. These networks, composed of strong and weak ties, connect individuals to valuable resources such as information and opportunities (Rademacher & Wang, 2014).

Granovetter (1983) defined ties strengths “a (probably linear) combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie.” (Granovetter, 1983).

Tie strength refers to the degree of closeness of a relationship. Strong ties typically refer to close relationships with family and friends, whereas weak ties refer to acquaintances. Individuals tend to gravitate towards people with similar values, backgrounds, and attitudes, thus their social circles possess similar kinds of information and interests. While this can be beneficial, weak tie connections offer access to diverse points of view and information. In addition, weak tie connections are less emotionally attached as they do not share an intimate relational history (Felmlee & Faris, 2013) (Wright & Miller, 2010).

Weak-Tie Network Theory

Weak-tie networks provide access to different points of view, people, and information. Career Services play an essential role by facilitating opportunities where students can connect with their peers, hiring employers, and faculty. By participating in these events and networking, students can learn how to build networks, confidence, and make connections (Forret & Dougherty, 2001).

Weak-tie relationships involve minimal investment and access to a wide array of social networks. As emerging technologies continue to evolve, they offer new opportunities to build upon the social networking theory and weak-tie network theory with fresh applications (Liu, Sidhu, Beacom, & Valente, 2017).

Hoye et al. (2009) used a two-wave longitudinal study to test whether there was a relationship between one's social network structure and composition, networking behavior, and employment outcomes with a sample of 1,177 unemployed Flemish job seekers. Results suggested that networking may be more effective for job seekers who have weaker, but higher-status ties (Hoye, Hooft, & Lievens, 2009).

Lin and Le (2019)'s study used structural equation modeling to test the relationship between networking behavior and job search outcomes with a sample of 773 Vietnamese university graduates. In order to measure job search and networking behavior, Lin and Le (2019) used numerous variables including personality traits, job-search clarity, networking comfort, network size, and tie strength (Lin & Le, 2019). Results suggested that networking behavior had a positive effect on a job seeker's interview and offer attainment.

While modern research continues to expand upon Social Network Theory, Côté et al.'s (2006) study draws from a review of 30 prior studies and presents original findings on how social class relates to empathy and moral decision-making. While the focus was not on networking directly, their analysis offers a useful lens for thinking about how social class may influence interactions in weak-tie networks. Since empathy shapes how individuals navigate social situations, these findings raise important questions about how students from different backgrounds experience and respond to networking opportunities. This becomes especially relevant in virtual recruitment settings, where limited social cues may amplify class-based differences in how students build connections (Côté, Piff, & Willer, 2006).

Building on the studies presented, this study aims to investigate students' experiences within weak-tie networks during virtual events. Research suggests that one's network is positively related to recruitment outcomes, but the question remains as to whether the event format impacts

success. To address this gap, this study will use a qualitative approach, offering a fresh perspective that could expand our understanding of the topic and provide insights not captured in previous studies.

How Networking Impacts Job Search Success

Networking behavior is defined as the effort of a job seeker to build and maintain relationships that will directly and positively impact their career (Hoye, Hooft, & Lievens, 2009). It is a primary means for university-level students to learn about employment opportunities, build relationships with industry representatives, and gather advice (Hoye, Hooft, & Lievens, 2009).

Mowbray and Hall (2020) narrow networking behaviors in three key ways:

- **Active:** When the job seeker is in direct need of or receives information from a new or existing contact. For example, the job seeker participates in a recruitment event.
- **Harvest:** When the job seeker mentions their job search or interests in passing and that contact follows up later. For example, the job seeker mentioned they would be interested in a summer internship and the contact reaches back out in a few months when those internships have been posted.
- **Passive:** When the job seeker receives unsolicited information. For example, the job seeker receives a list of jobs to apply to from a friend without asking.

Hoye, Hooft, and Lievens (2009) divide networking into two categories:

- **Formal:** Utilizing official avenues that exist primarily for recruitment purposes such as a job fair, career centre, or recruitment agencies.
- **Informal:** Contacting friends, relatives, or acquaintances to speak about job search activities.

Regardless of the format of networking, whether virtual or in-person, formal or informal, networking is crucial for university-level students as it offers insights into companies, open positions, and networking opportunities with professionals and recruiters. To emphasize its importance, research shows that 80% of jobs are filled through networks and 70% of jobs are never publicly advertised (Nawej, 2022). While some students may have pre-established professional connections through family and friends, many must build their own relationships throughout their studies.

To facilitate students building their own relationships, Career Services and employers work together to host a variety of activities that provide students with the opportunity to network and build relationships with potential employers, alumni, and peers, and learn about different industries and job opportunities (Genßler, 2023). Examples of these activities include:

- Career or Job Fairs: Typically hosted by university Career Services, companies set up booths to meet students, share information about their career opportunities, and raise awareness for students who may not have heard of them before.
- Information Sessions: Hosted by a single company to give students insights into the organization, its culture, available opportunities, and tips for navigating the recruitment process. Students attend to learn more and have the chance to ask questions.
- Networking Events: These events focus on building connections between students and employers in a more informal setting. Examples could include:
 - Speed networking event where each student gets 1-on-1 time with an employer for a brief period (30 seconds up to 5 minutes) to introduce themselves and make an impression
 - Cocktail hour in a restaurant or bar

- Networking dinners with a small group of students
- On-site organizational tours where students visit the company in-person and engage with staff
- Talks and Workshops: Companies get the attention of potential applicants by presenting on an interesting topic, sharing career insights, or offering skill-building workshops. Examples could be “A Day in the life of...” or providing a walkthrough on how to use a tool or platform.

The traditional assumption is that university-level students participate in networking events for the purpose of recruitment. A study conducted by Boyd and Boyd (2020) discovered this assumption was highly publicized by career centres as a justification of the expense to host these events, however interestingly enough, none of the ten students interviewed expressed a belief that participating in one of these events would land them a job immediately (Boyd & Boyd, 2020).

The motivations behind their participation were linked with a curiosity to explore career options, acquire new insight and information, and gain a sense of direction on what they could do with their selected programs of study. They also viewed participating in these events as the first steps towards building a long-term, meaningful relationship with a recruiter (Boyd & Boyd, 2020).

As networking remains a key activity for university-level students in their career pursuits, it was not always the case. To better understand its purpose, it is essential to understand the evolution of Career Services within higher education and how they adapted over time to meet the changing needs of students and employers.

How Career Services Have Evolved to Adapt to the Everchanging Job Market

Over the past few decades, Career Services in higher education have evolved from a transactional job placement approach to a more connected and personalized approach which will be further explained throughout this section (See Figure 2) (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014):

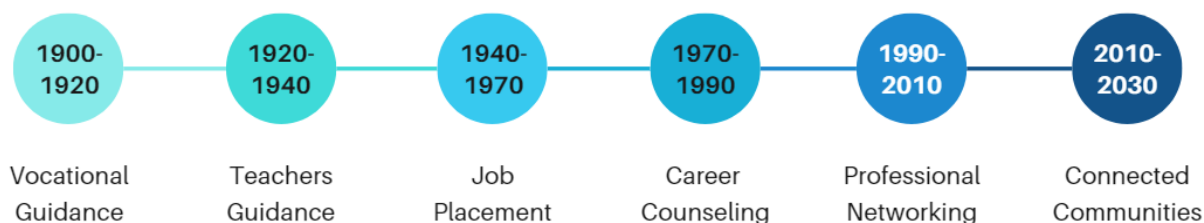
- In the early 1900s, before the creation of university career centres, faculty took it upon themselves to mentor students for future employment.
- Post World War II (1940-1970), universities began shifting away from faculty-led mentoring toward more formalized career guidance services. Universities started assisting employers with job placements amid the booming economy. Career Services were responsible for matching graduates' abilities and interests with job criteria. Success was measured by placement numbers.
- By the 1970s and 1980s, higher education shifted towards a student-focused development model, prompting Career Services to adopt a counseling approach. This shift forced students to take ownership of their own career development and job search and Career Services focused on counselling, career planning, and job search preparation support. Success was measured through appointment and workshop attendance counts.
- The dot-com boom, a period of rapid growth and investment in internet-based companies, of the 1990s and 2000s increased competition for candidates, which prompted career centres to enhance employer relations and networking opportunities. With less funding from universities, Career Services became dependent on corporate sponsorships thus shifting their focus to employer relations. Success was measured through corporate sponsorship and attendance.

- Following the economic downturn of 2008, universities had to reinvent Career Services to prioritize personalized connections, career development, experiential learning, and mentoring. Success is measured through the amount of new contact organizations and lifelong contacts.

The reinvention of Career Services was spurred by the change in careers, the extensive amounts of information available online, and the ease to apply to hundreds of positions with a click of a button. Students are less likely to stay in one job for their entire career. Consequently, the focus of Career Services shifted to offering networking hubs that connect hiring organizations to current students and new graduates (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014). Through relationship building, career centres can build strong communities that provide meaningful connections to employment opportunities as well as mentoring and experiential learning over time.

Figure 2

Evolution of Career Services in Higher Education (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014).



Business Program Context

Networking has long been seen as an effective job-search strategy, and university career centres organize networking events to provide students with the opportunity to network and build relationships with industry professionals. Networking does not only provide access to

information and employment opportunities, but also social support, validation, and feedback (Lin & Le, 2019).

However, recruitment practices can vary significantly across different fields of study. AACSB-accredited business schools provide a more consistent career experience given the strict guidelines set by the AACSB, the world's largest network and global standard-setting body for business education (Global Business Education Network, 2024). Schools with this accreditation must fund their own Career Services and follow strict guidelines, ensuring a more controlled and comparable career experience for students, compared to general university centres which may offer less specialized support and where recruitment practices can vary widely across different programs.

Networking is a key activity in recruitment (the process of identifying and attracting qualified candidates to fill job openings). Traditionally, recruitment centered on physical connections and in-person interactions, however, the COVID-19 pandemic forced many universities and employers to adapt and offer these key networking opportunities virtually (Lin & Le, 2019).

Bridging Talent Management and Educational Technology

Recruitment events are designed to provide students and prospective employers the opportunity to network and build relationships to facilitate employment - whether internships, full-time, part-time, or contract - during their studies or directly following completion of their degree (less than 1 year out).

Recruitment events organized by university career centres have played a vital role in facilitating connections between hiring organizations and potential candidates since the 1990s (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014). These events are crucial for university-level students, enabling them

to build and maintain their social networks and enhance their ability to successfully gain employment during and after their studies.

From the employer's perspective, these events are a crucial piece of their talent management process. Talent management involves not only hiring the right candidate but also retaining and developing them to meet everchanging business needs (Jothi & Savarimuthu, 2022). The integrating of educational technology in this process, especially in virtual recruitment formats, has created new avenues for organizations and candidates to interact and raise questions about their effectiveness and potential to replace in-person avenues.

Since COVID-19, the popularity of virtual recruitment options has increased intensifying competition for talent as employers and candidates now have access to a broader range of opportunities. To compete for top talent, employers must position themselves as an employer of choice by staying aligned with talent trends. Current talent trends include upskilling, hiring for potential over experience, prioritizing work-life balance and flexibility, and recognizing candidates as consumers in the recruitment process (Jothi & Savarimuthu, 2022).

To stay competitive, organizations must first leverage technology to attract and develop top talent. By participating in virtual recruitment activities, the organization can increase their awareness and showcases their adaptability to new technologies. In addition, the development of knowledge management infrastructure is essential to train employees on these new systems and upskill to align with evolving business needs. Lastly, offering flexible work arrangements including remote work, and implementing feedback opportunities can help to gather data to better understand and support employee needs (Jothi & Savarimuthu, 2022).

Historically, these valuable recruitment touchpoints have taken place in person. However, as the recruitment landscape continues to evolve, the question remains whether the virtual event format continues to be appropriate and effective for recruitment events.

In-Person Events

In-person events involve booking a physical event space and selecting a date and time for all participants to be present. Venue selection depends on the event format, ranging from a cozy restaurant setting for an informal networking cocktail, or an expansive convention space hosting a career fair or theater-style settings for presentations. These events foster invaluable face-to-face interactions, enabling participants to pick up on non-verbal cues such as body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice (Executive Networking Post-Pandemic: Online Vs. In-Person Networking, 2023). Furthermore, it also allows for more personal and tailored conversations. Many candidates have specific personal questions that are better to be asked in a 1:1 environment instead of in front of a full crowd allowing for participants to break off from the crowd to have these types of discussions. In addition, it allows for candidates to share more about their individuality and feed off body language and energy.

Those in their early careers benefit from attending in-person events as they require informal feedback and exposure to help build their personal networks (Yanai & Lercher, 2020). One participating in an in-person recruitment event may expect to dress professionally, bring hard or virtual copies of their CV or business cards, practice a strong handshake, and be prepared to introduce themselves to a wide variety of people.

Despite the positives, in-person events can be costly, have space and geographical limitations, time constraints, and limited scalability.

Virtual Events

Virtual events are conducted entirely online and mediated through video conferencing platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams and virtual event tools such as vFairs and Hopin. During the onset of COVID-19, many universities switched to offering their recruitment events online to replicate as much of the in-person dynamic as possible during a time that people could not gather (Green, Martínez-Rigol, Meller, & Pion Da Rocha Paranhos, 2021).

Virtual events offer a variety of advantages including time saving and greater flexibility, increase accessibility options (e.g., subtitles in different languages, option to increase text size, removal of physical barriers), elimination of travel expenses and accommodation, and the ability to attract a larger audience around the world (Scarlat, et al., 2020). This format is especially convenient for Generation Z who are more inclined to engage with organizations who employ effective recruitment techniques (Smith & Kumari, 2023). They are also convenient for attendees looking to gather information without in-depth conversation.

Despite the positives, virtual events may lack privacy controls, require a financial investment for hardware, software, and online connection, higher distractions in one's remote location, and information overload to name a few (Scarlat, et al., 2020). Organizers must carefully consider the technology they are selecting for the event and how it will impact on the attendees. Questions to consider include: Must attendees create an account? What are the functionalities (video streaming, chat, audio, exhibition booths, interactive features, networking, etc.)? What is the format of the event? How can they best prepare?

While most universities have returned to offering in person event offerings, virtual events continue to evolve in tandem with students' evolving event expectations (Green, Martínez-Rigol, Meller, & Pion Da Rocha Paranhos, 2021).

Theories Related to the Expectations of Events

Genre Theory

The concept of genre theory is that there are expectations that people bring to different experiences. This principle extends to recruitment events, yet another genre that is characterized by specific expectations and conventions. As highlighted within Carliner and Boswood's (2004) article, genre is 'a familiar pattern, a way of organizing information that has become so common that readers will probably recognize each new instance as belonging to the genre' (Price & Price, 2002). It helps to categorize and provide insight on shared conventions, styles, and content. As genres become more common, users begin to form expectations and perceptions about the genre.

At the time of Carliner and Boswood (2004)'s article, they provided a list of emerging genres in online communication, which included demos, blogs, gaming-simulations, virtual classes, and newsletters, alongside their respective expectations. In the last few years, since the transition from in-person to virtual platforms has disrupted the established genre conventions and limited research exists, virtual recruitment events can be seen as a modern emerging genre (Carliner & Boswood, 2004).

Drawing from examples presented in Carliner's *Training Design Basics* (2015), think of literature and the expectations associated with dramas, comedies, horror, thrillers, etc. If a viewer watches a comedy that lacks humor, they will be disappointed. Participants should always be advised when their expectations will not be met. The same goes with event formats.

For training and other information materials, Carliner (2015) identifies four main areas that the expectations pertain to which I have applied to virtual recruitment events:

- Type of material available: A virtual recruitment event can have various purposes such as informing attendees about opportunities at a specific company, educating on career paths

within the industry, providing recruitment tips and tricks, connecting with company representatives and alumni (building weak ties), and more.

- **Structure or format of the information:** Event formats will differ based on the goals presented above. If the goal of the event is to network, hosting a 2-hour presentation with no opportunity to talk would not meet the expectations of attendees looking to attend a networking event. If the purpose of the event is to provide attendees with the opportunity to learn more about a company or industry, it may be expected that there will be a presentation, panel, or talk for others to listen in.
- **Communication style:** Depending on the format, attendees at the events may use different communication styles. For example, if a student is attending a recruitment event, a recruiter may be more direct if a student did not come prepared or do their research on the company. If a student is attending a networking event, a recruiter may be more understanding if a student did not come prepared or do their research on the company as they are attending the event to learn more.
- **Other expectations:** Other expectations may include the expectations surrounding logistics. In a virtual event, attendees may expect to have access to the chat function, show themselves on video, unmute themselves to speak, have a presentation slide deck shared during a presentation, etc.

In addition, Carliner and Boswood (2004) further applied genre theory to analyze the effectiveness of recruitment materials in professional contexts. Through applying to the context of virtual recruitment events, researchers or event planners can identify which genres resonate most with the target audience. For example, at the undergraduate-level, interactive workshops or

panel discussions featuring current students or alumni could be an effective genre allowing students to learn or connect with recent graduates who were in their shoes not too long ago.

Furthermore, by leveraging online platforms, event planners can align with the expectations of an online generation. Part of the recruitment event experience is for students to learn more about recruitment options, companies, and connect with representatives or alumni to build their network. Berkenkotter & Thomas (2016) emphasize the importance of genre knowledge in shaping communicative practices and facilitating learning transfer. By allowing genre theory to inform the design of virtual recruitment events for undergraduate students, we can better address their needs and increase success.

In this study, we employ genre theory to examine the expectations and perceptions of university-level students regarding virtual recruitment events. While genre theory offers insights into how students may perceive and engage with different event formats, to get a better understanding of how these events fit into the larger scheme of things, social network theory will be introduced.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter justifies the methodology used to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the expectations and perceptions of university students regarding networking and advancing within their job search?
2. What are the expectations and perceptions of university students regarding virtual recruitment events?
3. How do participants perceive the relationships between virtual and in-person events?
 - a. Are virtual events seen as complementing or replacing in-person events?
 - b. What are the strengths and limitations of virtual recruitment events?
4. How do virtual events support students in forming social networks necessary for effective career advancement?

This section will begin by justifying the choice of the methodology. Then, it will explain how the sample was selected, how the data were analyzed, and finally, how credibility and trustworthiness of the study were assured.

Choice of Research Methodology

This study required the use of a method that helped explore and understand the expectations, perceptions, and experiences of five (5) final-year university-level students at a comprehensive university in central Canada regarding virtual recruitment events. Two main research approaches were considered: quantitative and qualitative.

To begin, while quantitative approaches, such as surveys and questionnaires, often measure people's perceptions and experiences by focusing on numerical data, the purpose of this study was not to predict outcomes, but to better understand a phenomenon. By exploring students' unique experiences and expectations, this study aimed to uncover insights that may be

overlooked by quantitative methods, thus this approach was not selected (Conrad & Serlin, 2011).

In contrast, qualitative research focuses on “discovering and understanding the experiences, perspectives, and thoughts of participants”, making it more suitable for this study (Conrad & Serlin, 2011). Qualitative studies collect data through interviews, case studies, ethnographic work, and similar methods. This study used semi-structured interviews to capture the diverse perspectives of final-year university students in Central Canada regarding virtual recruitment events.

Semi-structured interviews were selected because this format provides a flexible yet structured framework that guides the discussion while allowing participants to elaborate on their experiences, offering a better understanding of the phenomenon. This format also allowed the interviewer to ask follow-up questions and probe for more details.

Criteria for Selecting Participants

To determine the participants, Robinson’s (2014) four-point approach to qualitative sampling was used.

Point 1: Define a sample universe

Participants in this study were final-year undergraduate-level business students at a comprehensive university in central Canada, each with less than 30 credits remaining in their degree and less than 5 years of work experience. The selection criteria are as follows:

- Final-year students (less than 30 credits remaining in their degree) were selected as they will be joining the workforce within the next year (unless they continue their studies) and may be more likely to participate in networking events.

- Undergraduate-level students: Undergraduate students were selected as master-level students tend to have more experience in the workforce. Undergraduate students tend to have smaller networks and work to grow their professional networks during university.
- Business program: One program of study was selected as networking experience can vary significantly across different faculties or fields. Business students from AACSB-accredited schools were selected, as these institutions must adhere to strict guidelines from the AACSB, the world's largest network and global standard-setting body for business education (Global Business Education Network, 2024).
- Less than 5 years of working experience: Participants with over 5 years of working experience typically have larger networks. This study aimed to explore how participating in networking events supports job search efforts and relationship building.
- Central Canada-based: A single geographical location was selected as networking practices may vary by region.

By focusing on demographic and geographical homogeneity, the study was better able to highlight participants' unique experiences and perspectives (Bickman & Rog, 2009).

Point 2: Decide on a sample size

This study focused on five participants. This number was chosen based on feasibility and practicality. Given the time limitations to complete a graduate-level program, selecting between 3 to 16 participants is recommended to allow for time for interviews and an in-depth analysis of each one (Robinson, 2014).

Point 3: Selecting a Sample Strategy

The participants in this study were purposefully selected. This ensured that participants who fit the specific criteria were selected, and the focus was put on their unique experiences and perspectives by minimizing variability (Robinson, 2014).

Point 4: Sourcing Sample

To recruit a diverse sample, outreach was conducted through existing networks, including career advisors, students, and professional colleagues, leveraging relationships built through prior work experience at a university career center. No financial incentives were offered to participants for their involvement in the study. Details of the study and its requirements were shared via direct email and social media (See Appendix A).

Interested individuals were invited to complete a qualifying survey created in Google Forms. Before accessing the survey, participants reviewed and completed an information and consent form (Appendix B). The qualifying survey (Appendix C) confirmed whether participants met the study criteria.

Eligible participants were contacted by email and invited to participate in a virtual interview via Zoom lasting approximately one hour (see Appendix A). An interview-specific information and consent form (Appendix D) was also provided to be reviewed and signed. Once completed, confirmation emails with the virtual meeting link, a reminder of the study's purpose, interview process, and participants rights (Appendix A) were sent. Reminder emails were also sent 48 hours prior to the interview.

During the interview, the interview guide (see Appendix E) was followed to ensure consistency for all participants with minor deviations allowed to accommodate clarifications and follow-up questions.

How Was the Data Analyzed?

Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and themes across the interviews (Delahunt & Brid, 2017). The process involved coding interview transcripts via Excel and ChatGPT to uncover key themes related to participants' expectations, perceptions, and experiences at virtual recruitment events following the six-step method outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006):

1. Become familiar with the data: Read through the transcripts numerous times to familiarize with the data, make notes and jot down early impressions.
2. Generate initial codes: Start to organize data into meaningful groups. Code every segment of text that is relevant to the research questions.
3. Search for themes: Organize codes into broader themes.
4. Review themes: Review all the data associated with each theme and consider whether the data supports it. Themes should be coherent and distinct.
5. Define themes: Clearly describe the scope and content of each theme.
6. Write-up: Conduct the final analysis and provide sufficient evidence of the themes within the data.

The strengths of a pattern were determined by their recurrence in the interviews based on the following:

- Themes present in all interviews (five of the five) constituted a dominant pattern.
- Themes that are recurrent in four of the five interviews constituted a strong pattern.
- Themes that are recurrent in three of the five interviews constituted a weak pattern.
- Themes that are recurrent in two of the five interviews constituted an interesting pattern.
- Themes that are recurrent in one of the five interviews constituted a noteworthy pattern.

Assuring Credibility and Trustworthiness

To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the study, several strategies were used throughout the research process.

Frame Interview

To ensure credibility and trustworthiness of the research, a frame interview was conducted at the beginning of the research to identify and address any initial biases that could potentially influence the outcomes. Frame interviews provide a structured opportunity for researchers to critically reflect on their positionality and prior experiences before data collection begins (Roulston & Shelton, 2015). In this case, the interview involved a recorded conversation with a master's-level colleague familiar with qualitative research. The discussion focused on the researcher's background in recruitment and career development, exploring how this experience might shape the framing of questions, interpretations, or interactions with participants.

This process helped the researcher become more aware of the potential for bias and highlighted the importance of following a semi-structured interview guide to maintain consistency across interviews and to minimize the influence of leading questions. During the analysis phase, the researcher used ChatGPT to assist with transcript review and pattern checking, helping to ensure that no relevant themes were missed and that coding decisions remained reflective of the data collected.

Peer Debriefing

Following the analysis, a peer debriefing was conducted with another master's-level student familiar with qualitative research. Peer debriefing is a technique where a neutral peer offers critical feedback to help the researcher remain closely tied to the data and question interpretations (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The reviewer, who was not involved in the study,

offered feedback on the clarity and consistency of the findings and confirmed that they appropriately addressed the research questions. Their feedback led to minor revisions in the presentation of certain themes, improvements to the overall flow, and the addition of clarifications where needed. This process aligns well with Creswell and Miller's (2000) description of peer debriefing as a strategy to enhance credibility by providing an external check on the research process.

Committee Review

Lastly, as this study was a single-researcher study, the study was thoroughly reviewed on an ongoing basis by a thesis committee, rather than involving multiple researchers.

Chapter 4: About the Participants

This chapter introduces the five participants who were interviewed for this study. To protect their confidentiality, pseudonyms will be used instead of their real names. The criteria to be selected for an interview were final-year undergraduate-level business students or recent graduates (within the past 365 days) at a comprehensive university in Central Canada.

The first three interviewees were final-year students: Robert (finance major), Matthew (business technology management major), and Vanessa (international business major). The final two interviewees were recent graduates: Elodie and Emmett, both accountancy majors.

Each profile begins with a description of the participants' educational background, status, and relevant work experience. The profiles then summarize their personal expectations and perceptions of networking and virtual recruitment events, their views on the relationship between virtual and in-person events, and the role of virtual events in building connections. All interviewees have experience participating in recruitment events and networking.

Participant 1: Robert

“What really makes you stand out as a candidate, what gets your foot in the door, is definitely the networking aspect.”

The first interviewee to be profiled is Robert. This section will introduce Robert’s educational background, status, and relevant work experience. Then it summarizes his personal expectations and perceptions of networking and virtual recruitment events, his views on the relationship between virtual and in-person events, and his thoughts on the role of virtual events in building connections.

Background

Robert is a final-year undergraduate business student majoring in finance who will graduate in 2025. He currently works part-time at a bank to gain experience in the field and hopes to secure a full-time role at the same bank upon graduation. Due to his previous employment at an on-campus career centre and his personal motivations to increase his network, he states that he has significant experience participating in networking and recruitment events, both virtually and in-person.

Expectations and Perceptions of Networking and Its Impact on Job Search

Robert views networking as an essential component of career success, crediting his most recent position and upcoming interviews on references or mutual connections. For example, he applied to three different roles within the same bank and only received a call back on the application that had a referral. Similarly, for his upcoming interview at a consultancy firm, he only received a call back for an interview when a friend connected him with a recruiter from the firm. Given these experiences, he believes his connections were able to open doors to opportunities that would have otherwise been inaccessible.

Robert's perceptions have emerged from experience. When Robert attended his first networking event, he felt like a "fool". He believed that he would be formally applying to jobs, so he brought a bunch of CVs with him to hand out and figured he would be hired based on tangible things, such as GPA, work experience and the number of extra-curriculars on his CV. He quickly learned that is not how networking worked.

"I thought when I'm looking for a job that I would be selected as the best candidate based on merit. I found out that it is not necessarily the case. It is not always based on merit in terms of tangible things that they can measure. Let's say your GPA, or the work experience that you have or the extra curriculars that you have done. What really makes you stand out as a candidate, what gets your foot in the door, is definitely the networking aspect."

Many employers declined his CV and asked him to simply add them on LinkedIn. Robert learned that employers use these events to "screen" candidates and see if they can identify anyone that might be a good candidate and connect with them through LinkedIn to continue the conversation. He quickly learned that you can be a top candidate on paper, but if you are not seen or putting in the time to network and participate in events, you will not be remembered.

He gives an example of a colleague that works with him who has been struggling to get a job despite her being a strong candidate. Her lack of a network is hindering her as "having a [referral] definitely get the person in the room and then after that merit comes into play."

These experiences have shaped Robert's view of networking events moving forward. He now sees them as a "two-way street" where he takes the same screening approach to see which "companies, cultures, and work environments will be a good fit" for him. By changing his perspective, he believes that it helped him a lot to build new connections and grow his confidence to attend these events and ask questions.

Now, he feels comfortable enough with his experience to give advice to his peers. Many of his peers believe that the connections through networking are not genuine and that they must “put up a front” to build new professional relationships. Robert believes forcing professional connections is not the way to go and while he encourages them to shift their perspective to learning as much as possible, he realizes that they may have to go on the same journey as him to truly learn how to shift their perspective and not take it too seriously.

Expectations and Perceptions of Virtual Recruitment Events

When he first started participating in virtual recruitment events, Robert had low expectations given he found them less engaging and more difficult to build connections than in-person events, however he has grown to appreciate their accessibility. He can save time and gain information from the convenience of his own home.

Despite these advantages, he finds that virtual events are less efficient as they lack the spontaneity of in-person events which allow for organic conversations.

Perceived Relationship Between Virtual and In-Person Events

When reflecting on the differences between virtual and in-person events, Robert states that the convenience of virtual events is a huge advantage. He appreciates being able to attend from the comfort of his own home, easily take notes, the flexibility in dress code, and avoid the overcrowdedness of in-person events. He further elaborated by stating that at virtual events you could dress “more comfortably on the bottom half” as no one can see virtually, and the hand raise feature helps to combat overcrowdedness by tracking whose turn it is to ask a question instead of waiting at a crowded booth where people frequently interrupt or speak out of turn.

Robert also commented that virtual events are great for information gathering given their ease and convenience, but they require extra effort to stand out as a candidate. He claims that “it is

really difficult to get your own personal questions or get one-on-one time with recruiters” at virtual events, and he believes that “speaking to someone in person, I would remember them a lot better than if I were to meet them virtually only.”

By contrast, Robert believes that in-person events do a better job at facilitating new connections. Preparing and attending an in-person events show that the participants are willing to put in the effort and that they are taking it more seriously.

“In person [events] allow you to connect a lot easier and better with the reps than the virtual ones. Just seeing them in person, just being able to communicate with them face to face. It is just a different level of connection that, in my opinion, you just do not get with a virtual [event]”

How Virtual Events Support Relationship Building and Career Advancement

Robert believes that virtual events can support relationship building and career advancement if students are strategic and proactive with them. They are also incredibly helpful for new graduates; however, Robert believes they will become less significant over time as he advances in his career.

“I think events are very helpful for students trying to get their first job right out of university or their internships, but once you are already in the industry [which I’ve heard from my peers who are already graduated and, in the industry,] that you just get to know people through your network while you are working. It does not necessarily have to be through events.”

He credits his career advisor for connecting him with someone with a similar career path to what he is considering. Virtual sessions allowed him to easily connect with this contact and build

a strong professional relationship over time. It would have been more difficult to do so in a large virtual event with many participants to make this connection.

Conclusion

Robert learned that networking is essential for opening doors more so than a strong resume. By shifting his perspective, he was able to truly take advantage of the events, reduce stress, and enjoy the process of building new professional relationships. After participating in his fair share of virtual and in-person recruitment events, he can confidently say that in-person events cannot be replaced by virtual ones. Although virtual events offer the benefits of getting information without all the effort of attending in person and can be a strategic follow-up tool, he believes you are far less likely to make a lasting impression or build a meaningful connection.

Participant 2: Matthew

“I approach people not because I need something, but because I want to.”

The second interviewee to be profiled is Matthew. Like Robert’s profile, this section introduces Matthew’s educational background, status, and relevant work experience. Then it summarizes his personal expectations and perceptions of networking and virtual recruitment events, his views on the relationship between virtual and in-person events, and his thoughts on the role of virtual events in building connections.

Background

Matthew is an undergraduate business student majoring in business technology management and plans to graduate in 2026. He is currently working part-time at a large global retailer and exploring personal entrepreneurial ventures while completing his studies. In his current job role, he works in a marketing department supporting national social media operations. Additionally, he

has launched and managed several personal entrepreneurial ventures, including a sneaker resale business, a wholesale distribution partnership, and a brick-and-mortar retail store.

Beyond this experience, Matthew is currently an events coordinator for a student association that serves a specific population within the university, which has provided him with experience organizing and participating in large-scale networking and recruitment events.

Expectations and Perceptions of Networking and Its Impact on Job Search

Matthew views networking as an essential and learnable skill that is crucial in today's job market. He credits all his professional opportunities to networking as he is never formally applied for a job opportunity. He secured a sales role at a large global retailer through a relative but worked his way up to his current role in marketing operations by networking. He also secured his past internship and part-time roles through personal connections putting in a good word for him. "I have never actually applied for a job. All the experiences were either offered to me or I was referred, or it was facilitated. And the one reason why was because of networking."

For him, networking is not about immediate returns, but about being intentional and building a relationship over time that may later lead to opportunities.

"I really view networking as something that needs to be authentic. I would never be like, hey, now that I know you, I expect this, or I'm entitled to this, or you need to this this for me. So, I approach people not because I need something, but because I want to. And I feel like that is something that most people confuse about networking."

His approach focuses on "warming up" connections overtime before ever making a request, focusing on offering value and building trust. He struggles with the entitlement his peers typically have when entering a networking situation. Matthew claims that it is "obvious when

people are inauthentic” and saying “scripted” things they think the employers want to hear for personal gain instead of speaking from the heart.

He credits his relationship-building skills from practice and from books like *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, which he has read multiple times.

Expectations and Perceptions of Virtual Recruitment Events

Matthew believes that the value of an event comes from its participants rather than the format or content. His mindset is that the attendees determine the energy and effectiveness, however he recognizes that virtual events require more effort to build connections and sustain engagement. In his experience, people tend to lose interest, get distracted, or rely on the chat box in virtual events thus reducing their effectiveness.

He blames students’ lack of enthusiasm or lack of effort to truly participate in a virtual event on the effects of the pandemic. People got used to sitting in a virtual room and forgot how to be “intentional, authentic, and enthusiastic”, however these feelings are amplified as it is hard to “read tone” in virtual events.

Although he attends virtual events, he tries to be strategic with intentional follow-up. He’ll write to participants or employers in the chat and let them know he would love to learn more or continue the conversation and, if they agree, he’ll reach out via LinkedIn or email to schedule one-on-one time afterwards to continue building on these new relationships.

Perceived Relationship Between Virtual and In-Person Events

When reflecting on the differences between virtual and in-person events, Matthew believes that virtual events are best used strategically. They can be a great tool when initiating and “warming up” new contacts, gathering information, or arranging follow-ups.

By contrast, he believes in-person events allow participants to build spontaneous and authentic connections. For example, when attending a recent event, Matthew realized that the participants may have a hard time finding the event space, so he went to the lobby to direct people. While doing so, he unknowingly met the vice-president of a large real-estate firm and built a connection with him while guiding him to the event. These opportunities are not possible when attending events virtually. Therefore, he views virtual events as complementary to in-person events, and not as a replacement.

How Virtual Events Support Relationship Building and Career Advancement

Matthew believes virtual events can support career growth if participants are proactive and intentional in their follow-up. He typically uses them to “open doors, not close deals”, emphasizing the importance of warming up connections before making any requests.

In all his initial follow-ups after meeting a new contact, he always uses the opportunity to be positive, express appreciation for their time, and offer value. He avoids appearing transactional or needy in his approach.

For example, after a virtual event, Matthew followed up with a speaker who mentioned wanting to get more involved with the university. Instead of using the opportunity to ask for anything in return, he connected the speaker with the appropriate university contact and checked in a few weeks later. Only after the relationship has been established did he share that he was interested in applying to one of their company’s posted roles leading the speaker to connect him with a recruiter which ultimately led to him getting an internship at a real estate firm.

This approach of building rapport first and asking later is central to Matthew’s philosophy.

Conclusion

Overall, Matthew sees virtual events as useful, but not enough on their own. They can support career growth if you put in the effort but strongly believes that participants will be less successful with a passive or transactional approach that is facilitated through virtual formats. He believes that in-person events offer greater opportunities for genuine and authentic connection, however one's mindset and approach to either format is what makes all the difference.

Participant 3: Vanessa

"I think it is more about the people you meet that build your career more than the hard skills."

The third interviewee to be profiled is Vanessa. This one will follow the same format as the previous profiles.

Background

Vanessa is a current undergraduate business student majoring in international business in the co-op program who will graduate in 2025. The co-op program is an experiential learning program run by the university which requires the student to complete three full-time internships as part of their degree. She is currently completing her final full-time internship at a global aerospace company. Her previous two internships were at a multinational cosmetics company and a technology company. While she has not yet secured a full-time position upon graduation, she is actively networking and attending events to explore opportunities.

She attributes her readiness to participate in events to the support she received from her university career centre and her classmates who helped reduce the fear around the networking process.

Expectations and Perceptions of Networking and Its Impact on Job Search

Vanessa initially believed that skills, experience, and simply participating in events would be the main factor in securing job opportunities, but overtime, she learned that networking and preparation are crucial to a successful job search. Vanessa believes that networking and the skills required to be a successful networker are more important than technical skills in a job search.

“I think [networking is] more about the people you meet that build your career more than the hard skills. I remember one time with my first manager, we were talking, and it is like if you do not have those soft skills those are hard to learn. Whereas the technical skills, anyone can learn them.”

Initially, she was scared and overwhelmed to participate as she did not know what to expect and how to best present herself; however, over time, she became more comfortable through practice. She remembers even struggling to send follow-up messages on LinkedIn to managers. After participating in a few events, she learned how to better prepare to get more out of the experience.

“I was just scared. I was very, very overwhelmed. I remember the first time even before attending one, I was scared to send a message on LinkedIn to someone, but I think that is more because I did not know how to do it.”

Expectations and Perceptions of Virtual Recruitment Events

When attending recruitment events, Vanessa expects to engage with company representatives, ask questions, introduce herself, and get some valuable insights about the company and culture. She expected this when she registered for her first virtual session, however while she was able to gather information easily, she felt they lacked the personal engagement needed to build

connections. It was difficult to engage directly with recruiters and ask meaningful questions in a large room of virtual participants.

“You can ask questions at the end, but it does not feel personal. You do not get to connect with the people and really get a vibe of the culture. Like they might be saying “we’re a people company”, but you do not really know because you are not talking to them directly.”

She also noted that virtual events made it easier for students to multitask and not be fully engaged. “I could be working and just put my computer on the side and hear what they are saying.”

Perceived Relationship Between Virtual and In-Person Events

Before participating in both styles of events, Vanessa expected virtual events to be a strong alternative to in-person events, however through experience, she believes they are more of a complement rather than a replacement. She finds them useful for information-gathering but less effective for forming lasting impressions or building strong relationships. In large group settings, it is difficult to stand out as online event formats “set an hour, they give a presentation, five minutes for questions, and that is pretty much it.”

Although breakout rooms might have helped this situation, they were not commonly used in the events that she attended. Most events ended after the presentation, which limited the opportunity for her to build new, strong connections.

In comparison to virtual events, Vanessa acknowledges that in-person events require more effort as attendees must dress professionally, think on the spot, and maintain eye contact, however she believes it is worth it as it is easier to connect and learn more about a company in-person. You can see how the employers act and engage with other students. “In person, you

actually get to understand a bit more just by whoever you are talking to or even when you are seeing them on stage, how they act, how they engage with other students.”

How Virtual Events Support Relationship Building and Career Advancement

Vanessa believes that virtual events can be useful and support relationship building and career advancement if done 1-on-1. She claims, “you actually get to have a one-on-one conversation and they’re actually paying attention to you.” It allows you to network on a more personal basis and build a relationship as opposed to surface level questions in a busy environment.

She uses LinkedIn to follow up after these conversations but admits she is still learning how to maintain those relationships long-term and how they support one’s career advancement. “I’ve become to understand the art of doing the first meeting, but maintaining it, that is the hard part.”

Conclusion

Vanessa’s experiences have led to her belief that networking is the most effective job search strategy. While she once found it intimidating, she now sees networking as a valuable tool for career advancement, more so than technical skills themselves. While she initially saw virtual recruitment events as an alternative to in-person ones, she now views them as a complement. While virtual options provide convenience, they do not replace the ability to connect face-to-face with recruiters and build stronger relationships.

Participant 4: Elodie

“Before finding out about [networking events], I thought once you graduate, you just look for a job and that is it.”

The fourth interviewee to be profiled is Elodie. This one will follow the same format as the previous profiles.

Background

Elodie is a recent business graduate who majored in accountancy. She currently works for a large North American transportation and logistics company. During her final year, she began to feel the pressure of securing a full-time role after graduation. While she originally thought that all she had to do was start applying online when she was ready, her classmates made her realize the importance of adding networking events as part of her job search strategy. She states, “to be honest, before finding out about [networking events], I thought once you graduate, you just look for a job and that is it.”. Fortunately for her, she listened to the advice and her participation in an in-person networking event led to a summer internship and later, full-time employment at the company she works now.

Expectations and Perceptions of Networking and Its Impact on Job Search

Elodie initially believed that landing a job post-graduation would be as straightforward as submitting online applications. However, after speaking with classmates and learning more about the competitive nature of the industry, she realized the importance of networking to secure a job and learn more about the career options available within the field.

Elodie views networking as a strategic tool to help building connections that can land her a job or introduce her to opportunities through referrals. She also views networking to gather information to help inform her career decisions.

“I did not really know what I wanted to do in terms of accounting. All I knew is that after graduation, I’ll become an accountant. I really did not know which direction I wanted to work in and so I really had to get to know and talk to people to find out what I would prefer in the future.”

Although she acknowledges the value of networking, Elodie admitted that she only began attending events during her graduating year, when the urgency of securing a full-time position before more urgent.

Expectations and Perceptions of Virtual Recruitment Events

Elodie finds virtual recruitment events intimidating. As someone who identifies as shy, she feels uncomfortable asking questions in large virtual settings. She believes that virtual networking is more effective when done 1-on-1 as it provides the opportunity to engage in meaningful, personalized conversations where you can learn more about them as people and get to know more about their day-to-day. In larger group settings, discussions tend to be more generic and broader to appeal to the large audience. She states that “if I were to have questions, I’d be too shy to ask them in front of other people. I prefer to have this one-on-one talk with the person in front of me.”

Her perception of virtual events was shaped by her online classes during the pandemic. Many of her peers would have their camera off and would rarely be participate in any discussions. “Half of the time when we got into breakout rooms, no one would talk... the other half of the time, I would participate if someone initiated through the chat box.” Elodie believes the chat box helps to break the ice and make communicating with strangers a lot less intimidating.

Perceived Relationship Between Virtual and In-Person Events

Although Elodie hasn’t attended a virtual recruitment event, she was able to draw from her experience in online classes. In her experience, virtual events formats make it difficult to engage meaningfully and often lead to passive participation. She suggested that virtual events would be more effective in small-group formats or in one-on-one coffee chat formats.

By contrast, Elodie considers in-person events more effective for making connections. For her, the human connection was essential and getting to see one's body language and energy played a key role in how she perceived the organization.

“I prefer to have this one-on-one talk with the person in front of me and I also like to see their body language. I feel like you can really tell when a person is not really interested in talking to you. It is about the human connection.”

For example, at an event that she attended in person, she connected with a representative of the company where she now works whose personality clicked well with her own, while she felt dismissed by a representative from a Big Four firm. This helped her decide which type of environment she wanted to work in.

Also, as she was actively looking for a job, the effort required to attend in-person events did not phase her as she was willing to do what was necessary to secure her next role.

How Virtual Events Support Relationship Building and Career Advancement

Although she has not participated in virtual networking events, Elodie believes that opportunities to build deeper professional relationships are more likely in smaller, more intimate formats.

Ultimately, Elodie does not believe virtual recruitment events will support her career advancement. Once hitting the workforce, she believes that she will continue to grow her network with her work colleagues and keep her mind open should she wish to branch out, however she will not be attending virtual events soon.

Conclusion

Elodie only realized the value of networking near the end of her degree. Despite the convenience of virtual settings, Elodie preferred in-person interactions as they allow her to get a

more personalized experience and build authentic connections. Even today, Elodie finds virtual events intimidating and passive, though she sees potential in smaller, more structured formats that allow for meaningful one-on-one conversations.

Participant 5: Emmett

“A good 80 or 85, even 90% of your chances of getting work or a job after studying [will] be through attending and participating in networking events.”

The fifth and final interviewee to be profiled is Emmett. This one will follow the same format as the previous profiles.

Background

Emmett is a recent business graduate who majored in accountancy. He currently works for a national accounting and business consulting firm and is preparing to begin the CPA program in the upcoming summer. Given the accounting industry is incredibly competitive, he has experience networking and participating in recruitment events to increase his chances of employment upon graduation.

Expectations and Perceptions of Networking and Its Impact on Job Search

Emmett considers networking to be essential to the job search, especially in the field of accounting and finance. He believes that “a good 80 or 85, even 90% of your chances of getting work or a job after studying [will] be through attending and participating in networking events.” From his perspective, job boards like Indeed and LinkedIn tend to be more helpful for individual with more work experience, whereas new graduates benefit more from building direct relationships.

Expectations and Perceptions of Virtual Recruitment Events

Emmett's first experience with virtual recruitment events were during the pandemic when there were no in-person options. He appreciated that virtual events were more accessible and less intimidating, however found the larger events to be impersonal and largely focused on discussing information already available online. While there were opportunities to ask questions during the question-and-answer (Q&A) period, he realized that virtual events were not optimal for relationship-building.

Perceived Relationship Between Virtual and In-Person Events

Emmett views virtual events as a complement rather than a replacement to in-person events. He sees virtual events as more convenient and accessible than in-person ones, but believed that making an impression and reading body language cues on which one would normally depend pose a greater challenge in the virtual environment. He commented:

“I do not see a lot of strengths being in an online event nowadays especially if you really want to make a more in-depth decision on the feeling you get from the person in front of you.”

Emmett believes that it is easier to build relationships through in-person events because participants can have more spontaneous and informal conversations that truly allow people to get to know the company, its culture, and the team. These moments can give participants a better sense of a person through their body language, energy, and level of engagement towards the event and its networkers. He claims in-person interactions help to “get to know how much they’re really interested in getting to know you” or if they simply want to increase their number of applicants.

How Virtual Events Support Relationship Building and Career Advancement

Emmett believes that virtual events can support relationship building and career advancement if used strategically. For example, he ensures to follow-up on LinkedIn after the event and references key details from the conversation to showcase his interest and as a reminder of who he is to the recruiter. He claims, “the rule of thumb is that if you meet someone through one of these events, the day after or two days later you reach out through LinkedIn with a basic message.” This helps to continue the conversation and break the ice for future communications.

He explained that these follow-ups typically include a brief note thanking the recruiter for their time, “one or two things that you talked about and then you say you are looking forward to keeping in contact.” The goal with this type of follow-up is to stay top of mind for the recruiter if opportunities arise that may be a good fit, and, if the recruiter accepts the request, opens the door to allow Emmett to reach out again later to let them know he is applied for a role or with any questions.

However, he is aware that not all follow-ups will result in deep professional relationships, especially with senior professionals given their hectic schedules. “With partners and managers, [the relationship will tend to] remain more surface level... most of the time LinkedIn messages can go unread for a couple of weeks.” He finds it easier to connect with recent graduates or junior professionals who are closer in age and having recently been in his shoes.

Conclusion

Emmett views networking as essential to launching a career in a competitive field such as finance or accounting, especially for new graduates. He views virtual events as a complement to in-person ones as they can be helpful to follow up and stay visible but believes that in-person

formats are more effective for making memorable first impressions and building new professional relationships.

Chapter 5: Cross Case Analysis

This chapter presents the results of the analysis of the data reported in the previous chapter.

As a reminder, to analyze the results, I used a thematic approach to identify recurring patterns across the participant responses. Codes were developed from key phrases and ideas shared by the interviewees and then grouped together to reflect shared patterns.

The results of the data collected in all five cases will be presented below in response to each research question. Themes are highlighted throughout the analysis, and, as a reminder, their strengths are determined by their recurrence in the interviews based on the following:

- Themes present in all interviews (five of the five) constituted a dominant pattern.
- Themes that are recurrent in four of the five interviews constituted a strong pattern.
- Themes that are recurrent in three of the five interviews constituted a weak pattern.
- Themes that are recurrent in two of the five interviews constituted an interesting pattern.
- Themes that are recurrent in one of the five interviews constituted a noteworthy pattern.

As a reminder, Table 1 summarizes the participant profiles that will be referenced throughout this chapter.

Table 1

Summary of participant profiles

Pseudonym	Program	Status	Notable Experience
Robert	Finance	Final year	Works part-time at a bank, former Career Center staff
Matthew	Business Technology Management (BTM)	Final year	Entrepreneur, social media operations at major retailer
Vanessa	International Business	Final year	3 internships across aerospace, tech, and cosmetics
Elodie	Accounting	Recent grad	Full-time at logistics firm; previously intern
Emmett	Accounting	Recent grad	Full-time at national accounting firm; preparing for CPA program

RQ1. What Are the Expectations and Perceptions of University Students Regarding Networking and Advancing Their Job Search?

In response to Research Question 1, six key themes emerged from the participants' interviews. These themes reflect how students perceive and approach networking as part of their job search. The following section explores each theme, and their respective strength based on participants' responses.

As noted earlier, networking behavior is defined as the effort of a job seeker to build and maintain relationships that will directly and positively impact their career. It is a keyway for university-level students to learn about employment opportunities, build relationships with industry representatives, and gather advice (Hoye, Hooft, & Lievens, 2009).

Networking as an Essential Skill

All five participants described networking as essential to career success indicating a dominant pattern. To emphasize this point, several students indicated that networking skills were more important than technical skills. As Vanessa explained, "I think it is more about the people you meet that kind of build your career more than hard skills. The technical skills, anyone can learn them." Similarly, Matthew shared, "I have never actually applied for a job. All the experiences were either offered to me or I was referred, or it was facilitated. And the one reason why was because of networking."

This aligns with Granovetter's (1983) theory of weak ties, which argues that individuals are more likely to find job opportunities through acquaintances rather than through close family and friends. Weak ties, such as new connections made at networking events, serve as bridges to information and opportunities that may not be otherwise available within one's immediate circle.

The participants' stories show this theory in action as they credited casual or new contacts for playing an important role in landing interviews, referrals, and job offers.

Preparation and Professionalism

Another dominant pattern across all five interviews is the effort required behind the scenes to be successful with networking. It requires preparation, professionalism, and consistent follow-up to build professional relationships. Students described doing research on companies, preparing elevator pitches, and using LinkedIn to maintain connections. Emmett noted, "I would take time to go online and see what of this company really attracted me and what did I know about them before even [talking] to anyone from that company."

The Impact of Referrals

Four out of five participants recognized the value and importance of referrals, indicating a strong pattern. Four participants mentioned that networking played a role in helping them access internships, interviews, or job opportunities not yet available to the public. Referrals from former colleagues, classmates, or professionals they met during events played an important role in getting them noticed by hiring teams.

Emmett recognizes that a contact from a student association was essential in landing him an upcoming interview: "someone I met through a student association passed my resume directly to their manager. That is how I got my interview."

Networking Can be Intimidating and Overwhelming

Another strong pattern emerged, in which four out of five participants described feeling intimidated or overwhelmed when they first began networking. Vanessa shared, "I was scared. I was very, very overwhelmed. I remember the first time even before attending one, I was scared to send a message on LinkedIn to someone. I think that [it was] because I did not know how to

do it.” Similarly, Elodie shared, “If I were to have questions, I’d be too shy to ask them in front of other people. I prefer to have a one-on-one talk with the person in front of me.” Participants often associated these initial feelings with not knowing what to expect or how to approach recruiters and professionals at events.

With time, however, participants described feeling more confident as they gained experience and received support from university Career Services. Vanessa notes, “After a few events, I learned what to expect, how to act, and how to prepare myself. It started to feel a lot more natural.” Robert echoed this feeling as he described how his nerves were accentuated when his expectations did not match reality: “I thought when I’m looking for a job that I would be selected as the best candidate based on merit... but what really makes you stand out as a candidate, what gets your foot in the door, is definitely the networking aspect.” As their understanding of networking grew, students became more comfortable initiating conversations, asking questions, and maintaining connections.

Networking Through Student Involvement

Three out of five participants discussed how involvement in student associations and extracurricular activities helped to facilitate networking opportunities, indicating a weak pattern. Rather than approaching recruiters as strangers, their roles gave them a purpose to start a conversation, which made the experience less intimidating. Emmett explained, “I was Vice President External [the person in charge of employer and community outreach] for my association, and that gave me reasons to reach out to companies. It made networking natural.”

Similarly, Vanessa claims that her role securing sponsorships for her student association helped her make connections that successfully impacted her job search. She shared, “Because I

had to reach out to companies, it gave me practice and actually helped me get more comfortable talking to recruiters during job events.”

Learning About Career Paths

Two students also emphasized that networking was not only helpful to get a job, but also a way of learning about career paths, indicating an interesting pattern. For example, Vanessa described, “I did not know what I wanted to do so I reached out to people in sales, marketing, and consulting to see what I fit with the most.” On a similar note, Elodie claimed that “networking gave me insight into what certain roles actually looked like and helped me make informed decisions.”

A summary of the key themes and pattern strengths for this research question are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Summary of Results for Research Question 1

Theme	Pattern Strength	# of participants
Networking as an essential job search skill	Dominant	5/5
Preparation and professionalism	Dominant	5/5
The impact of referrals	Strong	4/5
Networking can be intimidating and overwhelming	Strong	4/5
Networking through student involvement	Weak	3/5
Learning about career paths	Interesting	2/5

RQ2. What Are the Expectations and Perceptions of University Students Regarding Virtual Recruitment Events?

In response to Research Question 2, four themes emerged that reflect students' expectations and perceptions of virtual recruitment events. The following section explores each theme, and their respective strength based on participants' responses.

As noted earlier, virtual events are conducted entirely online. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many universities switched to exclusively offering their recruitment events online to replicate as much of the in-person dynamic as possible during a time that people could not gather. Even after in-person events resumed, many universities continued to offer virtual events to extend access to career services and sustain connections with students and employers outside of campus settings (Green, Martínez-Rigol, Mellera, & Pion Da Rocha Paranhos, 2021).

Convenience and Accessibility

All participants agreed that virtual recruitment events are more convenient and accessible than in-person events, indicating a dominant pattern. Events held online allowed students to participate despite their busy schedules, and eliminated barriers such as travel time. Vanessa claimed that she “could be working and just put [her] computer on the side and listen in. That is the only way I could attend sometimes”. Similarly, Elodie claims that “online events helped [her] show up, even when [she] was sick or couldn't be on campus.”

Lack of Personalization and Engagement

Despite the advantages of accessibility and convenience, four out of five participants (a strong pattern) described feeling a lack of engagement and personalization while attending virtual events as they offered less opportunities to speak directly with recruiters, ask personal questions, and enjoy spontaneous conversations.

Matthew criticized the typical format for virtual events, often structured as an information session, explaining that recruiters would spend most of the session “talking for 40 minutes and leave 5 minutes for questions. That is not really networking.” In addition, Vanessa echoes how “they’re just not personal. You are getting information, but there’s no vibe. You can’t connect with anyone.”

This reaction can be understood through the lens of genre theory, which suggests that participants go to events with specific expectations based on familiar structures and conventions (Carliner & Boswood, 2004). As outlined in Chapter 2, although virtual recruitment events are an emerging genre, students often brought expectations from in-person formats. For example, Robert expected to be handing out CVs and being judged based on GPA, while Matthew claimed many of his peers would prepare “scripts” to ensure they said the right things to recruiters, often coming across as inauthentic. Over time, by attending more events, students began to better understand the social expectations and informal rules surrounding networking events.

However, the medium itself also shaped students’ experiences. According to Carliner (2015), the features and constraints of the communication media influence how information is shared and how participants interact with each other. In the case of virtual events, features such as muted microphones, limited time for Q&A, and the absence of non-verbal social cues limited the ability to hold spontaneous conversations and build meaningful relationships.

Students attended virtual events with the expectation of two-way networking; however, they were met with a more passive, information-heavy experience with long presentations and minimal networking opportunities. This disconnect between expectations and the realities of the virtual format contributed to their perception that virtual events were less effective for building professional connections.

Purpose of Event

Three out of five participants recognized that virtual events are better suited for information gathering rather than relationship building, indicating a weak pattern. They saw them useful as starter events where you can go gather information about a company, their job opportunities, and culture before making the effort to participate in an in-person event. Emmett stated, “If the purpose is to just learn more about the company, I do not see the point in going to an in-person event just to get information about the company. Might as well do it online.” This weak pattern showcases how students assign different purposes to virtual formats.

One-on-One Strategic Virtual Networking

An interesting pattern emerged in two cases in which participants described using virtual tools such as LinkedIn and virtual coffee chats to continue conversations after an event. Rather than expecting deep connections during large-scale virtual sessions, they approached virtual follow-up to maintain and build on new relationships.

Emmett highlights this approach and recognized the importance of a personalized follow-up: “The rule of thumb is that if you meet someone through one of these events, the day after or two days later you reach out through LinkedIn... you mention one or two things that you talked about, and then you say you are looking forward to keeping in contact.”

While participants viewed in-person events as more effective for making initial connections, these one-on-one follow-ups in virtual spaces allowed students to continue building on new relationships and stay top-of-mind with recruiters.

A summary of the key themes and pattern strengths for this research question are presented in Table 3.

Table 3*Summary of Results for Research Question 2*

Theme	Pattern Strength	# of participants
Convenience and accessibility	Dominant	5/5
Lack of personalization and engagement	Strong	4/5
Purpose of event	Weak	3/5
One-on-one strategic virtual networking	Interesting	2/5

RQ3. How do University Students Perceive the Relationships Between Virtual and In-Person Events?

A. Are Virtual Events Seen as Complementing or Replacing In-Person Events?

B. What Are the Strengths and Limitations of Virtual Recruitment Events?

In response to Research Question 3, five key themes emerged regarding how students perceive the relationship between virtual and in-person recruitment events. This section addresses two sub-questions and explores each theme along with its strength, based on participants' responses.

Virtual Events Complement, Not Replace In-Person

All five participants viewed virtual events as complementary rather than replacements for in-person events, indicating a dominant pattern. Most participants described virtual events as a starting point to gather information or a convenient alternative for maintaining contact after an event, rather than an opportunity to begin the job interview process.

Strengths

In terms of the strengths of virtual events, all participants identified flexibility, comfort, accessibility, and efficiency, as major strengths of virtual recruitment events, indicating a

dominant pattern. Participants appreciated being able to log in from anywhere without needing to travel or dress professionally.

Robert explained, “You do not have to get fully dressed, the shoes and everything. You could kind of go halfway.” He also noted that the raise hand feature helps to ensure you get time to ask your question in crowded events: “If you raise your hand, there’s an order in terms of when they will speak to you.” Additionally, Emmett emphasized the value of comfort, “You are at your house, maybe you are a little bit of an introvert, you get to be in a more relaxed familiar mindset.” Vanessa also added: “I could be working and just put my computer on the side and listen in. That is the only way I could attend sometimes.”

In addition to these benefits, participants viewed virtual events as effective for gathering information about companies and opportunities before putting in the effort to attend an in-person event.

In terms of strengths of in-person events, all five participants perceived in-person events as more effective for making genuine connections, establishing rapport, and standing out to recruiters, indicating a dominant pattern. Students described face-to-face interactions as more dynamic, spontaneous, and allowed them to read body language more effectively. Emmett explained, “In person, you definitely get to know how much [a recruiter is] really interested in getting to know you or if you are just one of the millions of people that might be applying.”

Limitations

In terms of the limitations of virtual events, four out of five participants indicated that large-scale virtual events lack interaction, indicating a strong pattern. This theme, also addressed under RQ2, is highlighted here again in the context of comparing formats. Four participants described group virtual events (such as company webinars or information sessions) as passive, reinforcing

the perception that virtual events are useful for gathering information, but less effective for networking.

Elodie reflected on how “you can’t stand out when there’s 40 other people in the Zoom.” Similarly, Vanessa stated, “in online [events], we said one hour, they give a presentation and give minutes for questions and that is pretty much it so it is a bit harder to connect with them.”

By contrast, in-person events were generally preferred for relationship-building. But in terms of their limitations, three out of five participants recognized logistical challenges as a limitation to in-person events, indicating a weak pattern. Overcrowding at popular booths and the competitiveness of in-person settings sometimes made it difficult to have meaningful conversations with recruiters.

Vanessa claimed that “sometimes it is hard when there’s a crowd around one recruiter. You do not get to talk” and Matthew mentioned how when there is a popular employer “everyone is trying to impress the same person”. This can make it difficult to connect with recruiters and build relationships.

A summary of the key themes and pattern strengths are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Summary of Results for Research Question 3

Theme	Pattern Strength	# of participants
Virtual events complement, not replace in-person	Dominant	5/5
Strengths of virtual events	Dominant	5/5
Limitations of virtual events	Dominant	5/5
Limitations of virtual events	Strong	4/5
Limitations of in-person events	Weak	3/5

RQ4. How do Virtual Events Support University Students in Forming Social Networks Necessary for Effective Career Advancement?

In response to last research question, Research Question 4, four key themes emerged regarding how virtual events support students in forming professional networks necessary for career advancement. This section explores each theme along with its strength, based on participants' responses.

Effort Matters More Than Format

Across all interviews, a dominant pattern emerged recognizing that forming and maintaining professional relationships require effort. Regardless of the setting, participants emphasized that relationship-building depends more on their own preparation, outreach to contacts, and follow-up with those contacts regardless of whether the event was held in-person or online.

This finding aligns with network theory researched by Brass et al. (2004), who argue that network structure alone does not guarantee results, intentional and strategic action is required to build valuable ties. Similarly, without the natural support of physical proximity, which can help strengthen connections, students participating in virtual events must rely on deliberate follow-up to maintain new connections (Brass, Galaskiewicz, Greve, & Tsai, 2004).

Follow-Up is Essential, but Intimidating

Three out of five participants mentioned struggling with how to maintain relationships after the initial meet, indicating a weak pattern. Although they understood the importance of follow-up, they were unsure how to continue to relationship in a way that felt natural and respectful over time. For example, Elodie and Vanessa, both noted that keeping in touch after an event felt unnatural or intimidating and they are still working on learning how to be effective with their follow ups.

LinkedIn played a key role in maintaining professional connections after events. Several participants mentioned using the platform to follow up, send thank-you messages, and keep in touch. Emmett explained, “The rule of thumb is that you meet someone through one of these events, the day after or two days later you reach out to them through LinkedIn with a very basic message saying, “It was really nice to meet you through this event.” He also shared that he would reference one or two things they talked about and express interest in staying in contact.

Robert explained that he would ensure to connect with recruiters on LinkedIn within “24 to 48 hours” following the event “saying that you got your time” so he could use the opportunity to stay in touch with the recruiter.

The use of social media can help substitute for physical closeness by supporting ongoing communication that can help build valuable ties (Brass, Galaskiewicz, Greve, & Tsai, 2004).

Virtual Events Rarely Lead to Strong Ties

Participants were divided in their belief of how virtual events support the formation of social networks. Three out of five participants (weak pattern) expressed that although virtual events can provide useful information, they rarely lead to strong long-term or meaningful professional relationships as they tend to be more transactional and limited in opportunities for genuine relationship-building, as outlined in RQ3. This aligns with Granovetter’s (1983) distinction between weak and strong ties.

One-on-One Virtual Follow-Ups Can Help

Although large-scale virtual events were often seen as limiting, two participants (an interesting pattern) described how one-on-one virtual coffee chats after an event can be valuable to relationship building. By initiating personalized follow-ups, participants were able to move beyond surface-level interactions to more focused and personal conversations.

Robert shared how these one-on-one conversations gave him reassurance and perspective: “That definitely helped me out a lot. He gave me a really good perspective on how to approach networking, approach the job search. [He] was in my shoes [not too long ago] and would definitely relate to the experience that I’m going through.”

A summary of the key themes and pattern strengths for this research question are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Summary of Results for Research Question 4

Theme	Pattern Strength	# of participants
Effort matters more than format	Dominant	5/5
Follow up is essential, but intimidating	Weak	3/5
Virtual events rarely lead to strong ties	Weak	3/5
One-on-one virtual follow-ups can help	Interesting	2/5

Conclusion

Across all four research questions, the results suggest that university students view networking as an essential tool for career success. Although all participants appreciated the accessibility and convenience of virtual events, they all agreed that virtual events are not a replacement for in-person events. Instead, virtual events should be used a complement and can be useful for gathering information and facilitating follow-up conversations.

Regardless of the event format, students who prepared, followed up, and were intentional with their approach were more likely to form meaningful professional relationships. The participants in this study also noted that networking is a skill that anyone can develop and achieve success in. The one caveat that the participants in this study noted is the need to invest time in networking.

The importance of networking is noted by Robert who stated, “What really makes you stand out as a candidate, what gets your foot in the door, is definitely the networking aspect.” This was echoed by other interviewees who also credited referrals and spontaneous conversations as key pieces to job opportunities.

This aligns with Granovetter’s (1983) theory on weak ties, which highlights the role of acquaintances and casual connections in providing access to new information and opportunities. Participants recognized the value of participating in networking events to build weak ties and understood the importance of following up to continue building on new relationships.

Overall, the findings suggest that networking is a skill developed through consistent practice, preparation, and intentional relationship-building. Although virtual recruitment events offered valuable opportunities for information gathering, participants consistently viewed in-person interactions as more effective for building strong, long-term relationships.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

This chapter presents the conclusions of the study. It first discusses the implications of the results and closes with a discussion on the limitations of this study, and suggestions for further research.

This research is particularly timely, as recent labour market data show that young Canadians are graduating in one of the most challenging job markets in decades. Youth unemployment rates are at their highest levels since the mid-1990s, with many graduates struggling to secure roles in their fields despite holding relevant degrees (Benchetrit, 2025). These trends highlight the need to better understand how students approach networking and recruitment, particularly in virtual formats, to support their ability to build professional relationships that lead to meaningful career opportunities.

Implications

This section suggests the implications of this study. It first describes the implications for Career Services groups in higher education, recruiters in industry, instructional design and educational technology, and theory and research in the field.

Implication for Career Services Groups in Higher Education

Career Services groups in higher education play a critical role in preparing students for the job market through services such as career counselling, resume assistance, interview preparation, and recruitment event coordination (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014).

Throughout the interviews, participants consistently highlighted that support from Career Services helped them build confidence in networking. However, additional support is needed in post-event relationship management, particularly around follow-up and maintaining new connections over time. Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Offering targeted programming focused on strategies for post-event follow-up and relationship building, including workshops on how to maintain connections over time.
- Intentionally structure events to include time for one-on-one meetings between students and recruiters to encourage more personalized and meaningful conversations following events.
- Manage overcrowding at events by spreading out entry times, setting timers to encourage students to change booths at larger events and offering more small-event formats to allow students to speak with more employers.
- Select event formats based on the goal of the event. If the goal is to provide information about an organization, a virtual session may suffice. If the goal is to build relationships, in-person events or structured small group sessions should be prioritized. Clearly labeling the purpose of each event helps career centres guide students more effectively and ensure participants arrive with appropriate expectations.

Implications for Recruiters in Industry

Recruiters collaborate with Career Services and engage directly with students to build a pipeline of talent that will fill current and future roles. Based on the findings of this study, recruiters can increase student engagement in recruiting events and improve the outcomes of their recruitment efforts by:

- Inviting students to book one-on-one virtual follow-up calls, either during or after events, to strengthen new connections and show students how to follow-up.
- Offering clear guidance and feedback to help students refine their introductions, ask thoughtful questions, follow up effectively, and present themselves professionally. This is

especially important for first and second-year students or those with limited networking experience, as it can help build their confidence and professionalism.

- Prioritizing time for student questions and discussion during recruitment events, while limiting long presentations. This creates a more engaging and interactive experience, allowing students to ask about what matters most to them in a potential employer and not just what recruiters choose to highlight. It also creates space for more authentic dialogue, which can help support the development of meaningful professional relationships.

Together, these recommendations aim to support recruiters in fostering students' development of networking skills and professional relationships.

Implications for Instructional Design and Educational Technology

In addition to the implications for Career Services groups and recruiters, this study also offers insights that could inform instructional design and educational technology, the discipline in which I am conducting this research. The implications for the field pertain to selecting methods to support professional development and relationship-building.

The results suggest that students' engagement and satisfaction are closely tied to the structure, format, and level of interaction in an event or activity. Events and activities can be both informational and instructional. The results reinforce that when designing learning experiences, the format of the learning experience should be matched to the goal. The format of a learning experience is the way the content is delivered and the structure through which participants engage with it. For example, if the aim of a learning experience is to build skills like networking or relationship building, more interactive virtual or in-person formats, such as small group discussions, workshops, or one-on-one support, may be more effective than large webinars or lectures. If the goal is to share information efficiently, virtual formats may be sufficient.

By considering how students experience different formats, instructional designers can be more intentional in choosing methods that not only deliver instructional material but create opportunities for real connection. This study highlights that structure and interaction – key components of a format – matter just as much as the content itself and should be top of mind when designing both instructional and non-instructional activities.

Additionally, students bring genre expectations to virtual recruitment events based on their past experiences with in-person events. These expectations include opportunities to network one-on-one with recruiters, ask questions, and build rapport. When virtual formats are passive or presentation-heavy, students report feeling disengaged or disappointed.

Drawing from genre theory, this finding highlights that students interpret events based on expectations shaped by their past experiences in similar settings. Berkenkotter & Huckin (2016) refer to this as socially acquired genre knowledge, which is understanding developed through repeated participation to familiar communicative situations. Carliner and Boswood (2004) extended Genre Theory to training and instructional settings, reinforcing that the structure and delivery of a learning experience shape how participants experience it.

In the case of virtual events, when the format does not align with students' genre-based expectations, engagement may decline. To address this, instructional designers or event organizers should either adapt the format to meet students' expectations or clearly explain how the virtual experience differs from in-person events, so students can adjust accordingly.

Implications for Theory and Research

In addition to its practice implications, this study also contributes to the application of Social Network Theory, Weak-Tie Network Theory, and Genre Theory in the context of university recruitment events and networking. These theoretical frameworks informed both the design of

the study and the analysis of the findings. They also helped shape the research questions by focusing attention on how students build professional relationships and how different event formats influence that process.

Social Network Theory and Weak-Tie Network Theory provided a lens to interpret how students build and maintain professional relationships through recruitment formats. The findings support Granovetter's (1983) argument that weak ties are important for accessing new job opportunities. In virtual environments, students often need to put in more effort to maintain these weak ties. Without physical proximity, students must follow up more intentionally and consistently to maintain the connection. This suggests that virtual formats change the way weak ties are formed and require more deliberate strategies to sustain them.

Genre theory also shaped the analysis by offering a way to understand how students' expectations of recruitment events are influenced by their previous experiences with in-person formats. Although genre theory was originally developed to describe patterns in speech and writing, more recent work by Carliner and Boswood (2004) applied the concept to training and instructional materials. Berkenkotter and Huckin (2016) further expanded the theory by emphasizing how genre knowledge is shaped through repeated participation in familiar social setting.

In this study, students often brought expectations from in-person experiences into virtual ones, expecting to speak directly with recruiters, ask questions, and introduce themselves. which affect how they engage and form connections. When those elements were missing in the virtual formats, students reported feeling disengaged or underwhelmed. These findings show the importance of using Genre Theory not just to analyze events, but also to inform how they are

designed. Organizers of virtual events may need to include expected elements or clearly prepare students for how the experience will differ.

Together, these frameworks help explain how students engage with recruitment events and why they respond differently to various formats. While Social Network Theory highlights the importance of creating and maintaining relationships, Genre Theory helps to clarify why students expect certain features in recruitment settings and how they react when those expectations are not met.

Overall, the findings of this study suggest that although technology has created new ways to network and build professional relationships, the underlying principles of relationship-building remain the same. Social networks must be intentionally built, and event formats must support the formation of new ties. As virtual and hybrid recruitment practices evolve, future research may continue to expand on these theoretical frameworks, particularly as new technologies, platforms, and communication norms continue to change how professional networks are formed and maintained.

As digital tools like instant messaging, video conferencing, and asynchronous collaboration become more common, and as expectations around virtual professionalism continue to shift, the way students build and maintain relationships is likely to change. Career Services, recruiters, and students will need to continue adapting how they approach networking to stay effective in digital environments.

In terms of equity and access, this study did not ask participants to self-disclose whether they identified as having a disability or required accommodations, so it is not known whether any participants encountered barriers that may have influenced their ability to fully participate in

recruitment events. As a result, the findings may not fully represent the experiences of students who encounter accessibility challenges when engaging in virtual or in-person recruitment events.

As highlighted in the literature review, virtual events may increase accessibility through features such as subtitles in different languages, option to increase text size, and removal of physical barriers (Scarlat, et al., 2020). However, they may also introduce new challenges, including the need for reliable internet, difficulty focusing in remote environments, and the risk of information overload.

As virtual and hybrid events become more common, it is important to explore how these formats affect students with different accessibility needs. Career Services and event organizers should consider inclusive design practices to ensure all students can participate meaningfully in recruiter opportunities.

Limitations of the Study

This study focused on a small and localized sample of five participants, which limits the ability to generalize the data for the rest of the population not included in the study (Mwita, 2022). Although the study offered valuable insights into students' experiences with virtual and in-person recruitment events, several limitations should be considered. These limitations include:

- **Small and localized sample size:** This study was limited to five final-year business undergraduate or recent graduate students in at a comprehensive university in central Canada. This population may not reflect the experiences of students in other regions or academic programs.
- **Student-only perspective:** This study focused only on student perspectives. Including the perspectives of recruiters and university career centre staff members could offer more insight.

- Lack of representation from students with disabilities or neurodivergence: The sample did not specifically include or explore the experiences of students living with disabilities or neurodivergence. As such, the findings primarily reflect the experiences of neurotypical students without self-identified accessibility needs and may not fully capture how virtual recruitment events are experienced by students requiring additional support.
- Timing and context: Many participants completed a portion of their studies during the COVID-19 pandemic which likely influenced their perception of virtual formats. As technology continues to evolve, student experiences and perspectives may shift overtime.

Suggestions for Future Research

Building on the results and limitations of this study, several avenues for future research are recommended. The first is to expand the participant base. Including students from other faculties, universities, and regions would help determine whether the perceptions and experiences identified in this study are shared more broadly across diverse student populations.

The second suggestion for future research is to investigate the role of LinkedIn and professional social media. More specifically, future studies could explore how platforms like LinkedIn contribute to students' job searches, relationship building, and career advancement over time.

The third suggestion for future research is to conduct longitudinal follow-up with participants in this study. Considering how quickly technology has been expanding, this study could be conducted again in five years to see if virtual events use has shifted and whether participants' perspectives have shifted. In addition, participants did not see much value for virtual recruitment events post-graduation, therefore it might be valuable to see if this perspective has shifted after a few years in the workforce.

The fourth suggestion for future research is to study networking for non-university recruitment. Such research could extend to job seekers in industries outside of traditional university-driven recruitment pipelines, such as trade programs, para-professional programs, and more mature workers making career shifts.

The last suggestion for future research focuses on exploring the perspectives of Career Services professionals and recruiters on virtual and in-person events. These alternate viewpoints could provide valuable insight in how they go about building relationships with each other and with students, and their thoughts on advantages and limitations of each format, including strategies they recommend for students to use to help them stand out in these types of events.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Communications

Email to Personal Connection (Initial)

Dear [Name of Personal Connection],

I hope that all is well.

As you may know, I'm currently pursuing my master's in educational technology and I'm looking for participants for my thesis study on virtual recruitment events. My research aims to explore expectations, perceptions, and experiences related to these events, including how networking activities impact job search outcomes.

How can you help? Please consider sharing my survey with final-year or recently graduated (less than 365 days) undergraduate-level business students. Their participation could potentially lead to an invitation to an optional one-hour interview where I can delve deeper into their insights.

If you have any questions or know of any students who might be interested, feel free to share my contact information with them. Thank you so much for your support!

Best regards,

[Include hyperlink to qualifying survey with built in consent form]

Email to Personal Connection (Reminder)

Dear [Name of Personal Connection],

I hope that all is well.

Just a quick reminder that I'm still looking for participants for my thesis study on virtual recruitment events. If you know any final-year or recently graduated (less than 365 days) undergraduate-level business students who might be interested in sharing their insights, I would greatly appreciate it if you could pass along my survey link.

Their responses could potentially lead to an invitation to an optional one-hour interview where I can delve deeper into their experiences and perceptions.

Thank you so much for your help and support!

[Include hyperlink to qualifying survey with built in consent form]

Social Media Post – Open Invitation to Participate

Calling all final-year university business students in Québec!

I'm currently pursuing my master's in educational technology and I'm looking for participants for my thesis study on virtual recruitment events. My research aims to explore expectations, perceptions, and experiences related to these events, including how networking activities impact job search outcomes.

How can you help? Please consider sharing this post to help me spread the word. Also, if you're interested in sharing your experiences, I invite you to complete a quick 3-minute survey. This could potentially lead to an invitation to an optional one-hour interview where we can dive deeper into your insights.

Thank you so much for considering participating in my research!

[Include hyperlink to qualifying survey with built in consent form]

Social Media Post – Direct Invitation to Participate

Dear [Name of Student],

I hope that all is well.

I'm currently pursuing my master's in educational technology and I'm looking for participants for my thesis study on virtual recruitment events. My research aims to explore expectations,

perceptions, and experiences related to these events, including how networking activities impact job search outcomes.

How can you help? Please consider sharing this post to help me spread the word. Also, if you're interested in sharing your experiences, I invite you to complete a quick 3-minute survey. This could potentially lead to an invitation to an optional one-hour interview where we can dive deeper into your insights.

Thank you so much for considering participating in my research!

[Include hyperlink to qualifying survey with built in consent form]

No reminders for direct outreach.

Interview Invitation

Dear [Name],

Thank you for completing the survey.

After reviewing your responses, I would love to learn more about your networking experience.

For next steps, I would like to invite you to a 1-hour virtual interview via Zoom.

In this interview, you will be asked questions about your expectations, perceptions, and experiences regarding virtual and in-person networking activities. The interview will be audio recorded and transcripts will be generated so that I can accurately capture your insights in your own words. You may ask for clarification or to skip a question at any time.

If you wish to participate, I will ask you to:

- Complete the consent form
- Select an interview time using the Calendly link or contact me directly at [student email] with your availability over the next two weeks

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Thank you for your support!

Interview Confirmation

Dear [Name],

This is to confirm that you are being invited to participate in the below interview:

Interview Date and Time:

Zoom link:

Study Title: Getting ready for the real world: Final-year students and their virtual recruitment event experiences

If you have any trouble accessing the link or any questions prior to the interview, please do not hesitate to reach out to me directly at:

Celia Johnston
Master of Educational Technology Student
Department of Education, Concordia University, Canada
ce_johns@live.concordia.ca
(514) 969-4190

Thank you and see you soon!

Interview Reminder

Dear [Name],

This is to remind you:

Interview Date and Time:

Zoom link:

Study Title: Getting ready for the real world: Final-year students and their virtual recruitment event experiences

If you have any trouble accessing the link or any questions prior to the interview, please do not hesitate to reach out to me directly at:

Celia Johnston
Master of Educational Technology Student
Department of Education, Concordia University, Canada
ce_johns@live.concordia.ca
(514) 969-4190

Thank you and see you soon!

Thank You Note

Dear [Name],

I wanted to reach out and thank you again for taking the time to participate in my research. I truly appreciate your support! If you have any questions following the interview, please feel free to contact me at the following credentials:

Celia Johnston
Master of Educational Technology Student
Department of Education, Concordia University, Canada
ce_johns@live.concordia.ca
(514) 969-4190

Thank you!

Appendix B – Information and Consent Form (Qualifying Survey)

Study Title: Getting ready for the real world: Final-year students and their virtual recruitment event experiences

Researcher: Celia Johnston, Master of Educational Technology Student, Department of Education, Concordia University, Canada

Researcher's Contact Information: ce_johns@live.concordia.ca

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Saul Carliner, Department of Education, Concordia University, Canada

Faculty Supervisor's Contact Information: saul.carliner@concordia.ca

You are being invited to participate in the research study mentioned above. This form provides information about what participating would mean. Please read it carefully before deciding if you want to participate or not. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the researcher.

A. PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to explore the expectations, perceptions, and experiences of final year university-level students in Québec regarding virtual recruitment events. The research aims to investigate how students navigate these events, including how they form their expectations, how they network, and its perceived impact on their job search outcomes. Additionally, the study seeks to uncover the strengths and limitations of virtual events.

B. PROCEDURES

If you participate, you will be asked to take the following online qualifying survey.

In total, participating in this survey will take 3-5 minutes. The questions will ask about your demographic information and whether you have participated in activities aimed at advancing your job search. The purpose of the survey will be to determine whether you meet the requirements to be invited to participate in a 1-hour follow-up interview.

C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

No risks are anticipated from this study, nor is it intended to benefit you personally. You may withdraw your responses at any time and not accept the invitation to follow-up in a 1-hour interview.

D. CONFIDENTIALITY

We will gather the following information as part of this research: (a) name, (b) email, (c) phone number, (d) demographic information and (e) survey responses. We will only use the information for the purposes of the research described in this form.

We will not allow anyone to access the information, except people directly involved in conducting the research. We will only use the information for the purposes of the research described in this form.

The information gathered will be coded. That means that the information will be identified by a code. The researcher will have a list that links the code to your name.

We will protect your information as follows: The researcher will download the data to a Microsoft Excel file, which will be stored in a shared folder (password protected) and available to the research team. Your name, email, and phone number will only be used to identify and contact you for a follow-up interview.

We intend to publish the results of the research. However, it will not be possible to identify you in the published results.

We will destroy the information five years after the end of the study.

F. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

You do not have to participate in this research. It is purely your decision. If you do participate, you can stop at any time. You can also ask that the information you provided not be used, and your choice will be respected. If you decide that you don't want us to use your information, you must tell the researcher before October 31, 2024.

There are no negative consequences for not participating, stopping in the middle, or asking us not to use your information.

G. PARTICIPANT'S DECLARATION

I have read and understood this form. I have had the chance to ask questions and any questions have been answered.

Name:

Date:

Please select one of the following options:

- ☐ I agree to participate in the online survey under the conditions described.
- ☐ I disagree to participate in the online survey under the conditions described.

If you have questions about the scientific or scholarly aspects of this research, please contact the researcher. Their contact information is on page 1. You may also contact their faculty supervisor.

If you have concerns about ethical issues in this research, please contact the Manager, Research Ethics, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481 or oor.ethics@concordia.ca.

Appendix C – Qualifying Survey

1. Are you currently enrolled or a recent graduate of an undergraduate-level business program?
 - a. Currently enrolled
 - b. Recent graduate (graduated within the last 365 days)
 - c. No [send respondent to end of survey]
2. What best describes your educational status?
 - a. 30 or less credits completed
 - b. 31-60 credits completed
 - c. 61-90 credits completed
 - d. 91-120 credits completed (international or out of province students only)
 - e. Completed all required credits within the past 365 days
3. What is your intended path after completing your degree or upon recently graduating?
 - a. Pursue additional studies
 - b. Seek employment
 - c. Undecided
 - d. Other (please specify)
4. Have you attended any activities aimed at advancing your job search during your time at university?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
5. How are your study fees categorized?
 - a. Domestic
 - b. International
 - c. Canadian
6. Age group:
 - a. 20 or younger
 - b. 21-25
 - c. 26-30
 - d. 31-35
 - e. 36+
7. Which gender do you most identify with?
 - a. Female
 - b. Male
 - c. Non-binary
 - d. Transgender
 - e. Other: _____
 - f. Prefer not to say
8. With which of the following do you identify [Select all that apply]?
 - a. White
 - b. Black or African American
 - c. Non-white Latin American (including indigenous persons from Central and South America)

- d. East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Polynesian)
- e. Native American or American Indian
- f. South Asian
- g. Pakistani (e.g., Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, etc.)
- h. Southeast Asian (e.g., Cambodian, Filipino, Laotian, Vietnamese, etc.)
- i. West Asian/Arab (e.g., Afghan, Iranian, etc.)
- j. Persons of Mixed Origin (e.g., with one parent in one of the visible minority groups listed above)
- k. LGBTQ
- l. Person with physical disabilities
- m. Religious minority (such as Hindu, Jewish, or Muslim)
- n. Other: _____
- o. Prefer not to answer

Appendix D – Information and Consent Form (Survey)

Study Title: Getting ready for the real world: Final-year students and their virtual recruitment event experiences

Researcher: Celia Johnston, Master of Educational Technology Student, Department of Education, Concordia University, Canada

Researcher's Contact Information: ce_johns@live.concordia.ca

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Saul Carliner, Department of Education, Concordia University, Canada

Faculty Supervisor's Contact Information: saul.carliner@concordia.ca

You are being invited to participate in the research study mentioned above. This form provides information about what participating would mean. Please read it carefully before deciding if you want to participate or not. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the researcher.

A. PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to explore the expectations, perceptions, and experiences of final year university-level students in Québec regarding virtual recruitment events. The research aims to investigate how students navigate these events, including how they form their expectations, how they network, and its perceived impact on their job search outcomes. Additionally, the study seeks to uncover the strengths and limitations of virtual events.

B. PROCEDURES

If you participate, you will be asked to complete a virtual interview.

In total, participating in this study will take approximately one hour. The questions will ask about your expectations, perceptions, and experiences regarding virtual and in-person networking activities. You are not required to answer these questions and you may ask for clarification or to skip a question at any time.

C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

No risks are anticipated from this study, nor is it intended to benefit you personally. You may withdraw your responses at any time.

D. CONFIDENTIALITY

We will gather the following information as part of this research: (a) name, (b) email, (c) phone number, and (d) audio recording of the interview. The interview will be audio recorded and transcripts will be generated so that I can accurately capture your insights in your own words, but your name will not be recorded on tape. We will only use the information for the purposes of the research described in this form.

We will not allow anyone to access the information, except people directly involved in conducting the research. We will only use the information for the purposes of the research described in this form.

The information gathered will be coded. That means that the information will be identified by a code. The researcher will have a list that links the code to your name.

We will protect your information as follows: The researcher will store all data in a shared folder (password protected) that will be available to the research team. Your name, email, and phone number will only be used to identify and contact you for any clarification on your responses.

We intend to publish the results of the research. However, it will not be possible to identify you in the published results.

We will destroy the information five years after the end of the study.

F. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

You do not have to participate in this research. It is purely your decision. If you do participate, you can stop at any time. You can also ask that the information you provided not be used, and your choice will be respected. If you decide that you don't want us to use your information, you must tell the researcher before October 31, 2024.

There are no negative consequences for not participating, stopping in the middle, or asking us not to use your information.

G. PARTICIPANT'S DECLARATION

I have read and understood this form. I have had the chance to ask questions and any questions have been answered.

Name:

Date:

Please select one of the following options:

- ☐ I agree to participate in the interview under the conditions described.
- ☐ I disagree to participate in the interview under the conditions described.

If you have questions about the scientific or scholarly aspects of this research, please contact the researcher. Their contact information is on page 1. You may also contact their faculty supervisor.

If you have concerns about ethical issues in this research, please contact the Manager, Research Ethics, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ex. 7481 or oor.ethics@concordia.ca.

Appendix E – Interview Guide

Disclaimer: Please note that the interviewer is to follow the suggested text as closely as possible but may deviate to address clarification and follow-up questions.

Introduce myself and provide information on my background and purpose of the interview

Thanks so much for agreeing to participate in my research! Before we get started, I wanted to do a quick run through of what to expect from today and ensure to answer any questions that you have before we get started.

I am currently writing my thesis to complete the requirements for my MA in Educational Technology. As part of my research, I'm really interested in learning about your experiences with networking and virtual recruitment events. There are no right or wrong answers, and I'd love for you to share your honest thoughts and experiences.

The interview will last approximately 60 minutes and can be stopped at any time. Please don't be shy to ask for any clarification or let me know if any questions are unclear. I'll be recording the interview today so that I can review the audio recording and transcripts, but it will not be shared outside of this purpose.

All personal information collected during this interview will be kept confidential. I intend to publish the results of the research; however, it will not be possible to identify you in the published results.

Are there any questions before we start the interview?

[TURN ON AUDIO RECORDING]

Before we begin, I will ask you to orally consent to participate in this interview.

Interview questions

1. How do you define networking, and what role does it play in your job search?
 - a. Do you see networking as more or less important than other job search strategies?
Why?
2. How do you build relationships for the purpose of finding a job?
3. What role do recruitment or networking events play in finding a job?
 - a. How do in-person and virtual events compare and differ in helping you find a job?
 - b. What are your expectations for these events, and how well do they meet them?
 - c. Do you prefer virtual or in-person events for networking, and why?
4. Can you describe your experiences of making connections at recruiting events?
 - a. How does this differ between virtual and in-person events?
 - b. What tools or strategies do you use to maintain these relationships? For example, LinkedIn, follow-up email, coffee chats, or other methods?
 - c. How would you describe these relationships? Deep or surface level?
 - i. What do you consider to be the difference between a deep and a surface-level connection?
5. As you move forward in your job search, what role do you think recruiting events (virtual or in-person) will play?
 - a. Do you think recruitment events will become more or less significant in the job market over time? Why?
6. Is there anything else you'd like to share about your networking or job search experience?

Closing: Thank you for your time! Are there any final questions or comments you would like to share?