

**THE INFLUENCE OF INFORMATION DISPARITY,  
DISCRIMINATION AND GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION ON  
JOB SEARCH OUTCOME: DOES GOOD ACADEMIC  
PERFORMANCE HELPS OUTSTANDING GRADUATES  
FIND “GOOD JOB”?**

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**ABSTRACT**

*We conducted the current grounded theory research to address the research question “do outstanding graduates tend to end up getting better jobs?” Toward this end, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 22 outstanding graduates and 9 employees. First, we found that many participants, i.e., outstanding graduates, were unable to secure good positions during their job search because of the discrepancy between the job information that these graduates received in college and the actual demands of the market. Second, we found that many participants were discriminated by job recruiters and senior employees on the basis of the physical attractiveness, social network, and sex of graduates. Third, we found that the metropolitan dream of participants have created intense competitions for them during their job search.*

**Keywords:** Fresh graduates; job search; discrimination; information disparity; metropolitan dream.

## INTRODUCTION:

In many societies, conventional wisdom indicates that a person could get a better job through better education. Many people believe that if an individual graduates from a higher-ranked university with better grades, they can lead a more fulfilling career. By better job and more fulfilling career, we refer to ‘job appointments’ that fit a person’s expectations, and pay higher salary in comparison to the salary earned by individuals who received lesser years of formal education.

Nevertheless, contradictory opinions have been raised recently in many parts of the society. Recent research conducted by scholars indicates that many fresh graduates end-up holding job appointments that they have no interest (Ng, Shao, & Liu, 2016). Anecdotal evidence from news reports indicate that many graduates from branded universities ended up getting jobs that made them over-qualified. For example, working as butcher and security guards (Sina Hebei, 2013). In addition, the statistics from some countries indicate that college graduates did not earn significantly more than those who received lesser years of formal education. For example, in China, statistics indicate that the difference between the salary earned by fresh graduates after six months of their graduation and the salary of peasant workers has decreased from 33% in 2012 to 21% in 2015 (MyCOS Research Institute, 2013), (MyCOS Research Institute, 2016); (National Bureau of Statistics of the People’s Republic of China, 2013), (National Bureau of Statistics of the People’s Republic of China, 2016). Thus, it seems like collegial education does not necessarily equate a person with a better job and more fulfilling career.

An easy way to challenge this statement is to state the fact that among a typical batch of graduates, when we consider their academic performance, there will always be outstanding students, mediocre students, and bad-performing students. Given that there will always be more mediocre and bad students in comparison to those who are outstanding, it is corollary for us to observe more cases of college students not performing well in their career. For example, the low difference between the salaries of fresh graduates and peasant workers might be due to the presence of outlining data points at the lower ends of the salary distribution. However, this does not mean that those who had outstanding academic performance in college do not have a better job.

The current literature on fresh graduate employment has limited capacity in handling this opinion. The literature usually studies the issues of fresh graduate employment from a general perspective i.e., researchers tend not to focus on outstanding graduates to study their career development (Yu & Fan, 2011). Thus, given that there is a limited amount of research conducted on the outstanding student samples, we do not really know if graduates with outstanding academic performance tend to get better jobs. Thus, we conducted the current grounded theory research in China to fill the gap in research. We aimed to contribute to the literature by addressing this research question: Does outstanding graduates tend to end up getting better jobs?

## LITERATURE REVIEW:

In recent years, many scholars have turned their attention towards the issue of graduate students, unable to get their desired jobs (Jia & Sun, 2012); Ng et al., 2016). In order to help alleviate the graduate employment problem, some scholars focused their research efforts on studying the potential mechanisms that could have caused the student employment problem (Yang & Zhu, 2007).

In the mainstream literature, there are two contradictory perspectives which both tried to explain why some graduates were unable to secure high quality employment opportunity. While one of the perspectives attributes the cause of graduate employment problem to information obstruction whereas the other perspective attribute the cause of problem to information explosion e.g., (Liu, 2010); (Zhao, 2015).

From an information obstruction perspective, scholars who are interested in graduate career selection found the lack of essential information and experience to be some of the main factors that cause graduates end up in not getting their desired position (Zhao, 2015). By information obstruction, it refers to the inability of job seekers to receive essential information that they need for their job search in time (Wang & Peng, 1998). Many scholars believed that these graduates were culpable for their own plight. For example, it was reported that many of these graduates were interested only in academic performance when they were in school, they tended to pay no attention to information that is essential for their future job search (Ma, 2008), and they tended to have not enough effective communication with the relevant college administrators (Li, 2014). Some of them even refused to receive information on job search when they were still in school (Zhang & Wang, 2006).

On the other hand, scholars who are interested in studying how individuals process information, and how such processing could influence their career selection, tended to adopt the perspective that information explosion is the cause for graduates to have low quality employment (Liu, 2010). Information explosion refers to the

phenomenon of individuals being flooded with such a great amount of unfiltered information that makes them overburdened (Xie, 2013). These scholars argued that the prevalence of social media and internet has caused students to be flooded with too much broad and simple career information that is not relevant to their needs for career selection (Chen, 2014). While more information can allow a rational person to make better decisions, the flooding of unfiltered information to an undergraduate student who does not have much exposure or enough experience in making formal decisions will increase their likelihood of making the wrong decision (Xu, Yun, & Zhang, 2016); (Zhao & Li, 2013). Thus, instead of improving the quality of a graduate's career selection outcome, information explosion has caused them to suffer from lower quality decision outcomes, especially when they have based their decision on the wrong information.

Thus, based on the literature, in order to make better career decisions, a graduate need to have not only more information, but also higher quality information. However, in terms of job search and career selection, what type of information is high quality information and what is not? How does information actually influence the career of graduates? To fill this gap in research, in this research, we will focus on the influence of information on a graduate's career selection outcome.

## METHODOLOGY:

We adopted grounded theory approach for this research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967); (Ng, Huang, & Liu., 2016a). We adopted a mix of theoretical sampling method and snowball sampling method to choose our samples. We first interviewed outstanding graduates whom we know personally, and then asked them to recommend the other qualified participants at the end of each interview (Ng, Huang, & Liu., 2016a). We defined outstanding graduates as graduates whose GPA (Grade Point Average) score was above 4.0 (out of 5.0) when they graduated, and they must have received the bursary for outstanding students for at least two years, or have received recognitions in at least one university-level competition, when they were in school.

We approached 22 outstanding graduates in total. 6 of them are males, and 16 of them are females, and their age range was 22-25. They were working in the areas of finance, accounting, electric and electronic technology, and software development at the Nanjing City of Jiangsu Province in China when the interviews were conducted. In order to gain a more encompassing view on the conditions of the career of graduates, we also interviewed senior employees who are responsible for mentoring fresh graduates, and experienced job recruiters from companies (who have more than 3 years of recruitment experience). We approached 11 employees in total. Two of them refused to participate in this research. Amongst the 9 participants who took part in this study, 7 of them are males, and 2 of them are females, and their age range was 30-47. Three of them earned bachelor degree, and 6 of them were Masters. The specializations of their job were accounting, finance, education, consulting, and IT, and they were working in China's Shanghai City, Nanjing City of Jiangsu Province, and Changzhou City of Jiangsu Province when the research was conducted. Five of them were in the lower management of their company (e.g. supervisors and senior associates), two of them were in the middle management (managers), and two of them were in the top management (partner and chief executive officer).

We collected our data using semi-structured interviews. To ensure the smooth conduct of our interviews with outstanding graduates, we used such guiding questions as *"when and from where do you tend to receive what type and amount of career information"*, *"are you satisfied with the career information you received"*, *"do you think that you GPA provides you with any advantages during your job search"*, and *"what are the difficulties you faced during your job search"*. On the other hand, we used such guiding questions as *"how much emphasis do you place on a graduate's GPA"*, *"have you rejected any outstanding graduates"*, and *"what are the main reasons for you to reject outstanding graduates"* in our interviews with employees. Each interview session lasted about 40-60 minutes, and the data collection process ended when we reached data saturation.

## RESULTS:

We found in our interviews that many outstanding students who had good records and high GPA in college were unable to get good jobs. By good jobs, we refer to job appointments that fit a person's expectations, and pay higher salary in comparison to the salary earned by individuals who received lesser years of formal education. Common complaints that we recorded from these individuals were *"I don't know why! Why those (friends) who did not perform as well as me got my (job) position!"*, and *"good GPA is not as useful as we had previously thought during job search."* We will discuss our findings in detail from the following three perspectives: information discrepancy; discrimination; and metropolitan dream.

## INFORMATION DISCREPANCY:

Information plays a very important role in job search. Nevertheless, while the traditional career literature has also placed a lot of emphases on the role of information, scholars tended to focus on how such informational factors remain as the inability to receive essential career information on time that could influence an individual's career decision. The assumption seems to be that the job seekers have access to the information essential for them to get a good job, and they could embark on their desired career track if they are able to get the relevant information before the others could grab the opportunity.

However, in this research, we found that the reason behind many outstanding graduates end up in jobs that they have not desired is due to the information that they received in school which contradicts the actual circumstances of the job market, and they tended to know the demands of the market only, when they were at the late stage of job search.

In order to get the desired position, job seekers have to prepare themselves prior to job application and interview stages in order to meet market demands. For example, to get the relevant certificates before they start applying for jobs. However, we found that many outstanding graduates spent almost all of their time in college on studying and doing their coursework. The only thing that they focused on was their GPA, and they paid almost no attention to what job recruiters are looking for.

Ideally, graduates should be able to acquire the skills that the market needs from their college. However, due to some factors such as bureaucracy, we found that the content of courses, which many participants studied in college, were not designed to keep in pace with the developments of the industry. For example, some of our participants took courses that used outdated textbooks, because their college had so many rules for course instructors to follow, when they were choosing textbook for the course, that they were unable to update their choice of textbook for years. In addition, many of our participants also reflected that because the mission of their college was to provide broad knowledge on a wide range of topics to undergraduates, many essential professional skills demanded in the job market can only be learned by themselves during their private time. Thus, it usually takes more than good GPA in order to get a desired position, especially when it is very competitive. Sometimes, graduates even have to pass examinations from external institutions to get relevant certificates and credentials if they want to land in a desired job. For example, participants need to pass the Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) examinations prior to the job search stage, if they want to join the finance industry.

Indeed, many job recruiters whom we interviewed claimed that they usually give priority to job seekers who have obtained the relevant certifications (e.g. CFA) than those who merely have good GPA. They commented that they preferred this group of job seekers because it saves their expenditure on training, and also because they believe that these job seekers are hardworking and diligent than the others because they took the initiative to seek out the demands of the market in advance and make themselves prepared for the position that they applied.

In addition, we also found that many outstanding students tended to perform better on papers than in person. For example, we found that while those who spent more time on improving their paper test results ended up securing better scores in the Chinese National College English Test (CET) examinations, they tended to lose to those who spent their time practicing interview skills during the interview stage, especially when the interview session involved English communication.

Thus, when compared with those who spent more time studying courses, those participants who spent more time preparing themselves for the job market tended to have lower GPA and lower paper test results, but they led in job competition because they were better prepared for the market. Outstanding students tended to know what they lacked, only after they attended job interviews and rejected several times.

Based on our interviews, we found that one of the main reasons for outstanding students to become ill-prepared for the job market is because colleges tend to use GPA score as the main criterion for award recipient selection. College administrators tended to over-emphasize the importance of GPA, and underplay the importance of developing soft-skills, interview handling and passing professional examinations. Thus, to a large extent, the very reason for outstanding graduates to become 'outstanding' is that they study hard and spend more time on their college education which brought disadvantage for these during job interviews.

This situation will be exacerbated when outstanding graduates received maliciously distorted information from their friends. We found several cases of outstanding graduates being misled by their friends. For example, while these individuals tended to advise outstanding graduates against taking professional certification examinations, they nevertheless took the examinations behind their back. They tended to be social smart individuals who have conducted adequate research on the demands of the job market, and they spent a big portion of their time in making themselves prepared for the job market at the expense of their GPA. Thus, when outstanding graduates competed with them during job interviews, they tended to be disadvantaged despite having better GPA.



## DISCRIMINATION:

Based on our data, we found discrimination to be the second major cause for outstanding graduates to be disadvantaged during their job search. The first type of discrimination that we found is related to the physical attractiveness of the job applicant, and their social network. Several outstanding graduates we interviewed reflected instances of them losing to individuals who had lower GPA, but nevertheless were more attractive in physical appearance, and had better social network. By better social network, we refer to individuals whose family members have strategic business relationship with the organization that they sent their job application, and individuals who personally know the job recruiter, or key employee of the organization (e.g., manager or senior manager).

Most of our participants from the working group gave similar replies when we asked them to comment on this opinion. We found that many of them believe that the physical appearance of a job applicant reflects their job competency and morality, such that more attractive individuals ought to have better performance and conduct. In addition, our working participants also believed that job applicants who have better social network ought to be more competent and can bring more benefits to the company. They called these well-connected graduate job applicants as ‘paratroopers’, and called their interview session the “special session for person with *guanxi*”.

Our participants explained that in industries with high turnover rate, managers tend to prefer job applicants with better “short-term cashability”. For example, in the finance industry, many managers tend to favor individuals from rich family because they could sell financial products to their social network and bring more short-term profits to the company. These managers also tend to favor physically attractive individuals because they believed that these individuals have better chances to secure business contracts. Interestingly, when we asked whether they would prefer employing job applicants who have very good GPA, they seemed to presume outstanding graduates to be hardworking “nerds” from poor family who are physically unattractive. They dismissed our question almost immediately without any thoughts, and believed that the company should not “waste” their job vacancy on “theorists” who lack “practical skills”.

The second type of discrimination that we found is related to the gender of job applicant. Most of the female outstanding graduates that we interviewed had one or more experiences with losing their job to less qualified male applicants. For example, one of our participants lamented:

*“I spent my time studying hard. My GPA was a lot higher than all the guys in my cohort. I passed both the level 4 (basic examination) and level 6 (advanced examination) National CET examinations, and I took part in many college competitions. During my job search, I sent my job applications to 8 banks. However, I was only invited by 1 bank for job interview. None of the guys had passed their level 6 National CET examination. They had also sent their job applications to the same 8 banks that I applied. However, despite being a lot less qualified, they got job interview invitations from all of them! Such unfairness made me very upset!”*

To verify this opinion, we asked the participants from our working group for their comments. Indeed, many of our working participants believed that male workers can create more values for their company. However, it must be noted that our participant’s belief is not totally a reflection of the inequality of the society’s sexual social position (Zhang & Ying, 2012). At many instances, especially during the recruitment stage, the biasness that our working participants have against women is merely a result of wrongful over-generalization and the abuse of heuristics instead of distorted values that belittled the values of female.

For example, the foremost reason for our working participants to prefer male employees over female employees regardless of their academic performance is because of the Chinese government’s recent implementation of the national policy that relaxes the previous one-child policy to allow couples giving birth to the second child. Our participants commented that, by encouraging couples to give birth to a second child, the government has doubled the chances for the company to suffer from administrative chaos when their female employees go on maternity leave. Our working participants preferred employing male job applicants. Typical comments from our participants were:

*“Females need to go for maternity leaves. If you employ a female graduate, you need to be prepared for her to go on maternity leave soon. Considering the government’s recent second-baby policy, I need to worry that she might go on maternity leave twice! First, this means that all the previous trainings that I have sent her to will be forgotten by the time she is back from maternity leave. Second, she is likely to lose her touch with the market after staying at home for 90 days. I have to prepare to send her for more training while she is enjoying her paid leave at home. Why should I employ a person to get paid for resting at home?”*

The second most common reason mentioned by our working participants to discriminate women was that they had bad experiences with female employees who behave unprofessionally at workplace. For instance, refusing to do tiring duties by calling it a “man’s job” as an excuse. For example, one of our participants complained:

*“Females are more fragile than males. You will get a hard time when it comes to task assignments. You cannot*

*assign her dirty work or tiring duty She will tell you that this is not a “lady’s job”. Essentially, employing female is creating liability for the company. This is not how things should work here.”*

Whenever such situation occurred, our participants had no choice but to ask their male counterparts to take over the job. Thus, as our participants hear more such sex-based excuses from unprofessional female employees, they start to believe that male employees are indeed healthier and physically stronger, and they can push male employees to their limits by asking them to work overtime frequently without much worries. Thus, when our participants recruit new employees, they preferred to hire male applicants even when the competing female applicants were more academically outstanding.

### **METROPOLITAN DREAM:**

Based on our interviews, we found that almost all outstanding graduates dream to settle in a metropolitan city regardless of their birth location, hometown, or university, many of our participants expressed their desire to get a job in companies that are located at a metropolitan, and they preferred to work at the headquarters of an organization over working at its branch. The most common metropolitans mentioned by our participants include: Beijing City, Shanghai City, and Guangzhou City. During job search, this metropolitan dream among graduates causes harsh competitions due to limited availability of vacancies in the selected metropolitans.

Interestingly, we observed that many participants i.e., outstanding graduates were solely attracted to metropolitan positions and they ignored the possibility of working elsewhere. Some of our participants even mentioned that they gave up better job opportunities in their hometown because they believed that they would get demotivated and end up leading a mediocre life if they decided to settle at their hometown. In order to settle down at a metropolitan, these outstanding graduates were willing to take up jobs which they have not preferred earlier. Thus, the reason behind this group of outstanding graduates unable to secure a good job is because they would rather stay in a ‘bad job’ than to give up their metropolitan dream.

Indeed, similar opinions were voiced by our participants from the working group. They commented that despite the company’s branches were facing serious manpower shortages, they were unable to transfer enough manpower over to those places in need even if the management offered better compensation packages because ‘everybody’ wanted to stay at the headquarters. For example, one of our participants remarked:

*“If you ask them to go over to the branch, they will give you excuses like they are unwilling to work far away from home or to part with their partners. Come on, that is their hometown. The real reason is because they are unwilling to move out of Shanghai (City).”*

### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION:**

In this paper, we found that many outstanding graduates did not get a good job. Nevertheless, we would not push this finding further by claiming that excellence in academic performance means bad career. Instead, we like to invite scholars to rethink about the role of college in the modern society.

By definition, outstanding graduates refer to the group of students who graduated with the best performance. However, in this research, we found that from the perspective of job recruiters, the outstanding performance that these individuals had spent 4 years of hardwork to achieve do not have many implications for their employability. College should be the place where a person can acquire knowledge and skills that they need for the entire life. Many graduates started their college education with the prospect of being able to live their dream by acquiring these tools through spending their time working hard in the school. However, given that outstanding performance in school does not necessarily mean that the graduate can live their dream, we ask, has college fulfilled its role?

In our research, we found that obtaining a bachelor degree is not enough for a graduate to get a desired position. In addition, job recruiters expect graduates to acquire relevant professional certifications prior to their job application. However, given that, a student has chosen a subject that is supposed to teach them what they need for their future career, we ask, why must they sit for more examinations conducted by external institutions to get professional certifications after spending such long time learning in school? Is this an indication that the current college course structure is not professional enough for our managers to trust them in training the graduates what they need to know to get their work properly done, or is this an indication that the college has not taught their students enough knowledge and skills that are needed by the society?

College education and its curriculum needs to be reworked such that it aligns by the societies requirements so that the colleges have a reason to exist. We hope that we can motivate scholars to rethink the role of college education with the findings of this research.

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