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The jobless, dog days of summer

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The whole reason Alicia Ali took two courses this summer was to have a lighter load in her final year — and she took them at night, so she could make money by day.

But four months and some 20 resumes later, the McMaster University student hasn't made "a single penny" and will have to get a part-time job this fall, "which defeats the purpose of taking those courses.

"Honestly, I tried everything to get work, from mall job to waitress to receptionist. Maybe it's the economy, but as a student you feel like you're the bottom rung of the ladder," said the Whitby political science major.

As the end of summer looms, Ali belongs to the 20 per cent of Canadian university students who were unable to find work this summer, according to a new report by a Toronto-based think tank on higher learning.

The survey of some 5,000 students shows 19.8 per cent could not find work this summer, almost twice the student summer jobless rate cited by Statistics Canada, which doesn't count those who take summer courses.

But many students take courses because they can't find work or while they look for work — like Ali — so the two shouldn't rule each other out, noted co-author Miriam Kramer of Higher Education Strategy Associates.

"We need to raise public consciousness of the difficulty some students experience getting work."

University of Waterloo graduate Chanel Chien could not find work all summer, despite passing out more than 50 resumes for postings where "Omgod, hundreds of people showed up. It was ridiculous," said the 23-year-old sociology major from Mississauga who focused on retail and office assistant jobs.

She will live at home this fall and commute to a community college program in marketing in Toronto, which she hopes will "help me get work. It's impossible to find a decent job.

"After trying from April to June, I gave up."

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