

2011 University & College Applicant Study™

Ontario Colleges System-level
Report

Colleges Ontario

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Executive Summary

The University/College Applicant Study™ (UCAS™) surveys prospective students to gain insights into the PSE decision-making process, through the accurate and confidential measurement of:

- Applicant demographics, including socio-economic characteristics and educational profile
- Usage patterns for 30 marketing, recruitment, and media information sources, and the influence of these sources on applicant selection of first-choice institution
- Key factors (academic, financial, outcome, campus, and nurturing) weighed by applicants when they consider a PSE institution, and the impact of these factors on their application decisions

63,425 full-time applicants to Ontario colleges were selected to participate in the 2011 UCAS™, including 59,965 English-speaking applicants randomly drawn from the English-speaking pool, plus almost the entire French-speaking applicant pool¹ (3,460 applicants at the time of survey administration). The 12,086 college respondents who completed the survey to an acceptable cut-off point (11,330 English and 756 French) provide an overall response rate of 19%.

This sample size provides results at the 95% confidence level of plus or minus 0.8%.

Respondent Profile

The *typical* Ontario College UCAS™ respondent² is female, aged 18 to 24, most likely working part-time and residing in households reporting incomes of less than \$90,000. They attended a public high school, and are most likely to report high school grade averages between 75% and 79%. They are ultimately seeking a credential at the diploma level (2- or 3-year) and are applying to Health Science, Art & Design or Business programs.

Gender³: 56% female, 44% male.

Age: Close to one in five are 19, nearly one-third are aged 20–24, and 11% are aged 30 years and over.

Geography: 57% of applicants reside in communities of less than 100,000 people.

Household Income: Just over one-quarter come from households that earn less than \$30,000, and a similar proportion comes from households that earn from \$30,001 to \$60,000. One in 10 applicants comes from households with earnings greater than \$120,000.

¹ These respondents are defined by the language in which they submitted their application.

² Respondent data were weighted so that results are representative of the Ontario College applicant population.

³ Respondent data were weighted to reflect the gender distribution provided by Colleges Ontario on February 24th 2011

Employment: One in five was working full-time, while just over two in five were part-time workers when they completed the survey. Nearly one-third was unemployed and seeking work.

Language: While the majority (84%) of applicants speak English in their home, three percent speak French, two percent speak Chinese, and 11% use a language other than English, French, or Chinese.

Parental Education: Nearly one-third of Ontario college applicants have parents who never *completed* any post-secondary education. Seven percent do however, have at least one parent who attended a PSE institution but subsequently did not complete their studies.

Applicant Education: 41% of applicants were in high school full-time last school year, while one quarter were enrolled in college, university or continuing education. Just over one-quarter were not attending any school at the time.

Grade Averages: Over one-quarter have grade averages below 75%, while the most common grade average interval is from 75% to 79%. Just under one-quarter have averages between 80% and 84%, and a similar proportion achieve grades greater than 84%.

Academic Plans: One-third of applicants to Ontario's colleges ultimately plan to obtain a two-year college diploma and 18% intend to obtain a three-year advanced college diploma. Almost one-quarter wish to complete an undergraduate degree or four-year college degree. Health sciences represents the first-choice program for just over one-quarter of Ontario college applicants, followed by art & design (11%) and business (10%).

Marketing Efforts

- Internet based sources of information about colleges tend to be among the most used⁴ communication channels featured in the survey; however, in terms of influence, institution websites tend to have far more impact than education web portals in helping applicants decide which college they wish to attend.
- A college's promotional literature and email correspondence, students/graduates, and friends tend to be the next most used sources of information after college websites; although these tend to also be the more influential sources, other less used forms of communication such as campus visits, college liaison activity, and mail correspondence can be almost as, if not more influential in selecting a college to attend.
- Direct entry college applicants tend to make more use of information channels than do their counterparts. Those transferring from college or university are just as likely as direct entry

⁴ Facebook, MySpace, YouTube and Twitter are exceptions, as it's a minority of college applicants that use these applications to explore PSE options, and they tend to be among the least influential of information sources.

applicants to use informal campus visits or consultations with professors; however, they are slightly more likely to make use of institution calendars than their counter-parts.

- Program brochures, formal campus tours and open houses, and particularly college viewbooks tend to be slightly more influential upon direct entry applicants; however, this phenomenon does not extend to course calendars. Perhaps not surprisingly, liaison presentations and booths at regional institution fairs tend to have the most impact upon direct entry college applicants.
- Formal campus tours tend to be less influential among applicants with lower grade averages, particularly those with less than 65% as an average; Interestingly however, informal campus visits tend to be more influential than average among those with a grade average less than 65%.
- Compared to males, female college applicants tend to make more use of institution calendars, friends, program brochures, current students or graduates, institution websites, web portals, viewbooks, and email from admission officers. The opposite is true for college and high school coaches, Wikipedia, Shanghai Jiao Tong rankings, Globe and Mail Canadian University Report, and Twitter.
- Compared to males, female college applicants tend to find institution websites and institution liaison presentations more influential towards making a final choice of college. The reverse is true in regard to YouTube.
- College applicants residing in the GTA or Metro Toronto tend to make more use than average of institution calendars plus education web portals, and tend to report that they are more influential in the college decision-making process. The use of formal campus tours or open houses is lower than average in these same regions.
- The influence formal campus tours have in refining a college applicant's decision tends to be weaker in the Metro Toronto region than elsewhere. Similarly, booths at regional fairs are less influential in refining a college applicant's decision in Eastern Ontario.
- Just under one-third find their first-choice college's website to be somewhat, or less than somewhat appealing.
- Checking admission status, looking for information about careers or reviewing FAQs are the top things college applicants do when using institutional websites. Other than the Ontariocollege.ca website, portals college applicants most frequently use include Studentawards.com, ScholarshipsCanada.com, and Schoolfinder.com. Direct entry college applicants are more likely than their counter-parts to use Studentawards.com, ScholarshipsCanada.com, Schoolfinder.com, and Electronicinfo.ca.
- Just over one-third of college applicants find their first-choice college's viewbook to be somewhat, or less than somewhat appealing. Program descriptions, admission requirements, and tuition and fees are the top three items college applicants wish to see in a viewbook.
- Close to one-half of college applicants find their first-choice college's liaison presentation to be somewhat, or less than somewhat appealing.

- Email tends to be the medium⁵ in which applicants are most likely to prefer to receive correspondence from a college; however, in the instances of receiving a notification of acceptance, or course registration and fee information, regular mail tends to be the most popular format.
- Among those who did formally visit a campus, over one-quarter of college applicants find the formal tour or campus open house of their first-choice college to be only somewhat, or less than somewhat appealing.
- Among various personal electronic devices, the majority of college applicants (60%) own a Windows laptop, while only 12% own a MacBook. 72% of college applicants own one of the mobile phones listed. The highest proportion owns a Blackberry, followed closely by a mobile phone with QWERTY keyboard. Very few own an iPad or other tablet device.
- Those transferring from college or university are more likely than their counterparts to be owners of a Windows laptop, a MacBook, and/or a Blackberry. Direct entry college applicants are more likely to be owners of a mobile phone with QWERTY keyboard.

Key Decision Factors

- For 80% of college applicants career preparation is one of the main reasons they are pursuing post-secondary education. Other popular reasons include the exploration of options for the future, personal and intellectual growth, plus the accrual of knowledge and earning potential.
- Generally, direct entry college applicants are more likely than their counterparts to select many of the reasons featured in the study; however, this is not necessarily the case in regard to increasing earning potential, supporting personal/intellectual growth, enhancing confidence and self-esteem, giving back to society, career advancement, improving social status, and difficulty finding a job.
- Female college applicants are more likely than males to select many of the reasons featured, particularly for preparation of future graduate or professional study and to enhance confidence and self-esteem; however, improving social status, not being able to find a job, or anything to do, plus increasing earning potential are all reasons mentioned more often by males in comparison to females.
- When deciding which institutions are applied to, the majority of college applicants look for programs of interest that have a strong reputation to guide them; however, 17% are limited to their local institution due to financial constraints. One in ten applicants is primarily concerned with an institution's overall reputation. The emphasis placed on program reputation is at its highest among applicants interested in ultimately pursuing Master's degrees, or applicants interested in pursuing a college graduate certificate..

⁵ Other formats tested include online, regular mail, phone, and 'in person'.

- The specific college characteristics that continue to have the most impact on the institution selection process are program & institution reputation, and the perceived quality of both the faculty and the employment graduates attain. The reputation for student experience, co-op/internship opportunities and nearby campus location are other notable factors in this regard.

Funding

- Approximately one-half of college applicants consider themselves to be ‘very much’ concerned about matters relating to financing their education; specifically, having enough funding to complete studies raises the most concern.
- Fifty-six percent of college applicants have plans to apply for provincial student aid, and a further 22% were not sure about whether they would apply for this aid. The proportion applying for provincial funding rises to 75% among applicants reporting household incomes of less than \$30,000.
- Government loans (43%) are the source of funding that is most likely to be a college applicant’s major contributor⁶ to covering the cost of their first year of school, followed by personal savings (35%), and then family savings (33%). The proportion of government loans as the major contributor rises to 65% among applicants reporting household incomes of less than \$30,000.

⁶ A major contributor is defined as constituting at least 50% of funds.