

2009 University & College Applicant Study™

Ontario Colleges System-level Report

Colleges Ontario

Executive Summary

The University & Colleges Applicant Study™ (UCAS™) surveys prospective students to gain insights into the PSE decision process, through accurate, confidential measurement of:

- Applicant demographics, including socio-economic characteristics and educational profile
- Usage patterns for more than 20 marketing, recruitment, and media information sources, and the influence of those 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 those factors on their application decisions

The 10,400 college respondents who completed the survey to an acceptable cut-off point (9,938 English and 462 French) provide an overall response rate of 19.5%. This sample size provides results at the 95% confidence level of plus or minus 0.86 percentage points for findings specific to the Ontario college applicant population.

Respondent Profile

Ontario college applicants consider a range of colleges when selecting a post-secondary educational institution, but 22% also apply to university.

The *typical* Ontario college UCAS™ respondent¹ is female, aged 18 or younger, most likely working part-time and residing in households reporting incomes between \$30,001 and \$90,000. They attended a public high school, and report high school grade averages between 75% and 84%. They are seeking a credential at the diploma level (2- or 3-year), and are applying to Health Science or Business programs.

Gender: 56% female.

Age: Over one third are 18 or younger, one in five are 19, while over a quarter are aged 20-24.

Geography: Nearly three in 10 come from the GTA (including Metro Toronto), while slightly less than a quarter are from Southwestern Ontario. About one in five comes from Central Ontario, while 15% hail from Eastern Ontario.

Household Income: One quarter come from households that earn less than \$30,001, while about one in three comes from households that earn from \$30,001 to \$60,000. Slightly more than one in 10 applicants come from households with earnings greater than \$120,000.

¹ Respondent data were weighted so that results are representative of the Ontario College applicant population.

Employment: Slightly more than one in five are working full-time, while over two in five are part-time workers. Nearly three in 10 are unemployed but seeking work.

Language: Over eight in 10 speak English at home.

Parental Education: 22% of Ontario college applicants are first-generation PSE applicants, meaning that neither of their parents attended a PSE institution. The proportion of first-generation PSE applicants is 43%, if using the alternate definition of applicants whose parents had not *completed* a PSE credential.

Applicant Education: Two in five were in high school full-time last school year, while over one in 10 were in college full time. Over one quarter were not attending any school at the time.

Grade Averages: One in five have grade averages below 75%, while the modal grade average grouping is from 75% to 79%. About one quarter have averages between 80% and 84%, while slightly more than one in 10 achieved high school grade averages from 85% to 89%.

Academic Plans: More than one-third of applicants to Ontario's colleges ultimately plan to obtain a two-year college diploma and one-quarter intend to obtain a three-year advanced college diploma. Health Sciences is the first-choice program for roughly one-quarter of Ontario college applicants, followed by Business (12%) and Social and Community Services (7%).

Marketing Efforts

The 2009 UCAS™ reviews the use and influence of 21 different marketing sources and institutional marketing efforts.

Ontario college applicants make the greatest use of institution websites as sources of information on PSE options, and rate them the highest in terms of influence compared to all other sources.

Most applicants to Ontario colleges typically visited one to five websites, while one in five applicants (20%) visited at least six different sites. The most popular PSE institution website features for Ontario college applicants were checking admission status and career information.

Although campus open houses and formal campus tours were used by only 39% and 33% respectively, they were the next-most influential sources behind institution websites, each scoring 4.2 out of 5 on the influence scale. When asked how many campuses they visited *before* applying, slightly fewer than one third had not visited any (30%). More than a quarter visited one (28%), while slightly less than a quarter visited two (23%).

Print materials, such as program brochures and institution viewbooks, were used by two-thirds of applicants and scored 4.0 and 4.1 on the influence scale respectively.

Over half of applicants' parents reviewed their children's print materials from various PSE institutions.

Slightly fewer than one quarter of applicants looked at only one viewbook (24%), while three in 10 looked at two (30%). Direct entry applicants were more likely to have looked at five or more viewbooks, while delayed entry and former PSE² applicants were more likely to have only looked at one. Guidance counsellors were the source for 30% of applicants' first-choice viewbooks, while about one in five received it in the mail (22%).

Course calendars were used by half of Ontario college applicants and were 'quite a bit' influential (4.0 out of 5), while alumni mailings had low levels of use (20%) and had the lowest average influence compared to other marketing materials (3.6).

Recommendations from personal contacts were similarly influential (influence ranged from 3.7 to 4.0), and the proportion of Ontario college applicants that used these contacts was as follows: current students (59%), friends (55%), parents/family (42%), guidance counsellors (40%), high school teachers (30%), professors (26%) and high school coaches (10%).

Institutional contact in the form of email, mail and telephone were used by less than half of applicants, and ranged in influence from 3.6 to 4.0. When asked, over half preferred email (55%), while about two in five preferred regular mail (41%). Only 3% of applicants prefer to be corresponded with by telephone. Liaison presentations were used by over a third of Ontario college applicants (37%) - about a quarter attended only one presentation (26%), while slightly less than a quarter attended two (23%). One in five applicants visited institutions' fairs.

In most cases, direct entry applicants to Ontario colleges tend to use marketing sources/materials more than delayed entry and former PSE applicants.

Direct entry applicants not only use marketing materials more, but tend to be more influenced by them as well. However, institution websites, web portals, course calendars and recommendations from friends are significantly more influential for delayed and former PSE applicants than their direct entry counterparts.

Institution website use becomes greater the higher the applicant's grade average.

As for influence of sources by grade average, applicants with high school grades below 75% are significantly less influenced by institution websites, web portals and recommendations from high school teachers than applicants with grades of 75% or higher (*Table 3.4*). Applicants with grade averages of 90% or higher are the least influenced by campus open houses, while those with averages between 85% and 89% are the most influenced by open houses.

² 'Former PSE' combines 'PSE transfer' and 'past PSE experience' respondents' data. These were combined in order to ensure sufficient numbers for cross-tabulation statistical analyses of client reports - though not a factor in this system-level analysis.

Applicants to Ontario colleges that selected Fine Arts as their first-choice program make more use of institution websites, viewbooks, email contact, formal campus tours and recommendations from current students, friends, high school teachers and professors than applicants to Health Sciences, Business, Social Services and Trades.

Course calendar use is highest among applicants to Health Sciences and Social Services applicants, while alumni mailings were most used by Social Services applicants. Viewbooks were more influential for applicants whose first-choice program was either Business or Social Services than applicants to Fine Arts or Trades programs (4.2 vs. 4.0 out of 5).

Institution viewbooks, web portals and alumni mailings were used most by applicants from the GTA.

Recommendations from current students were used most by applicants from Southwestern Ontario and course calendar usage was highest among applicants from the GTA, including Metro Toronto.

Campus open houses and formal campus tours were more influential for applicants from Eastern Ontario and Eastern Canada than applicants from other regions.

Institution viewbooks were most influential for applicants from the GTA, Eastern Canada and international applicants and program brochures and were also most influential for international applicants. Recommendations from current students were more influential for Ontario college applicants from Western and Eastern Canada compared to all other domestic applicants (4.2 and 4.4 respectively vs. 4.0 out of 5).

Key Decision Factors

84% of Ontario college applicants said that career preparation was the main reason for applying to PSE.

Direct entry applicants are more likely to identify career preparation and increasing knowledge and are less likely to identify getting a better job or increasing their earning potential. Delayed entry applicants are more likely to identify personal growth and improving their social status.

More than half of all applicants to Ontario colleges (57%) seek colleges with strong reputations in their desired program, while 17% of applicants indicate that their financial situation has an impact on their decision-making process.

Selecting an institution with a strong reputation in a specific program of interest was more important to those with higher-grade averages than those with lower grades. When comparing applicants' PSE decision-making process by program of study, those who apply to the Fine Arts programs at Ontario's

colleges are much more likely to decide on an institution because of the specific program's reputation than applicants to the other most popular programs.

Funding

For applicants to Ontario's colleges, concerns about the monetary aspect of attending PSE continue to be quite high. Approximately three in five applicants were very concerned about having sufficient funding to complete their PSE.

Over half of applicants to Ontario colleges were very concerned about the amount of debt they might incur by the time they graduate. As would be expected, the level of concern over debt diminishes within higher income households. Approximately three-quarters of applicants to Ontario colleges are either somewhat (24%) or very much concerned (49%) about their ability to repay their debt from PSE within a reasonable time frame. As was the case with concern over holding debt, the greater the household income, the less likely applicants were to be 'very much' concerned about their ability to repay their debt within a reasonable time frame. More than three in four Ontario college applicants are somewhat (24%) or very much concerned (53%) about the availability of bursaries and student loans when it comes to funding their PSE endeavours. As applicants' high school grade averages increase, so does their likelihood of being very much concerned about bursary and loan availability.

Over half of applicants plan to apply for financial aid (52%).

The likelihood of planning to apply for financial aid decreases as applicants' household income increases and delayed entry applicants are more likely than direct and former PSE applicants to be planning to apply for aid.

Personal savings are a minor contributor toward covering costs for their first year of college for approximately half of applicants to Ontario colleges (48%), while they are a major contributor for more than a third (35%). As for family savings, over a third of applicants do not have any family savings to contribute to their first year of PSE (35%), while a third have family savings as a minor contributor (33%), and less than a third have family savings as a major contributor (32%). Nearly two in five applicants cited government student loans as a major contributor to their first year of PSE (39%), while approximately another quarter cited them as a minor contributor (23%). Nearly one-quarter of applicants will be using private loan sources as a funding option for their first year of PSE (23%).