

# 2010 University & College Applicant Study™

Ontario Colleges System-level  
Executive Summary

Colleges Ontario

# 2010 University & College Applicant Study™

## Ontario Colleges System-level Executive Summary

Colleges Ontario

January 2011

Copyright ©2010 Academica Group Inc.  
131 Wharncliffe Road South, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
London Ontario, Canada N6J 2K4

Toll-free in Canada: 1.866.922.8636  
[www.academicagroup.com](http://www.academicagroup.com)

**This is a proprietary and confidential document.**

*Subscribing institutions may disseminate this report, in whole or in part, to internal audiences only. Subscribers agree that they will not quote, nor provide access to, results that are specific to a university, college or parties outside their own organization without express permission to do so from the authors.*

*All contents are copyright ©2011 Academica Group Inc.*

*University & College Applicant Study™, UCAS™, and Academica Group™ are trademarks of Academica Group Inc.*

# Table of Contents

Executive Summary .....	4
Respondent Profile .....	4
Marketing Efforts .....	5
Key Decision Factors .....	7
Funding .....	8

# 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 almost 30 marketing, recruitment, and media information sources, and the influence of these sources on applicant selection of first-choice institution
- Key factors (reputation, academic, financial, outcome, campus, extracurricular and nurturing) weighed by applicants when they consider a PSE institution, and the impact of these factors on their application decisions
- Concerns with, and sources of funding for a college education

63,418 full-time applicants to Ontario colleges were selected to participate in the 2010 UCAS™, including 60,000 English-speaking applicants randomly drawn from the English-speaking pool, as well as the entire French-speaking applicant pool<sup>1</sup> (3,418 applicants). The 12,101 college respondents who completed the survey to an acceptable cut-off point (11,319 English and 782 French) provide an overall response rate of 19%.

This sample size provides results at the 95% confidence level of plus or minus 0.9%.

## Respondent Profile

The *typical* Ontario college UCAS™ respondent<sup>2</sup> 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) or a university undergraduate degree, and are applying to Health Science, Fine/Performing Arts or Business programs.

**Gender:** 55% female.

**Age:** One-third are 18 or younger, one in five are 19, while nearly one-third are aged 20-24.

**Geography:** One half of applicants reside in communities of less than 100,000 people.

**Household Income:** Just over one-quarter come from households that earn less than \$30,001, and a similar proportion 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.

---

<sup>1</sup> These respondents are defined by the language in which they submitted their application.

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

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

**Language:** Three percent speak French in their home, and 12% use a language other than English or French.

**Parental Education:** 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:** Nearly 40% were in high school full-time last school year, while over one quarter were enrolled in college, university or continuing education. Nearly 30% 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 in excess of 84%.

**Academic Plans:** Nearly 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 represent the first-choice program for one-quarter of Ontario college applicants, followed by fine or performing arts (12%) and business (11%).

## Marketing Efforts

Internet based sources of information about colleges tend to be the most used<sup>3</sup> among a series of 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; although these tend to also be the more influential sources, other less used forms of communication such as campus visits, college liaison activity, mail correspondence and course calendars can be almost as, if not more influential in selecting a college to attend.

---

<sup>3</sup> Facebook, MySpace, YouTube and Twitter are exceptions, as the minority of college applicants use these applications in exploring PSE options, and they tend to be among the least influential of information sources.

Direct entry college applicants tend to make more use of information channels than do their counterparts; however, those transferring from college or university are just as likely as direct entry applicants to use course calendars, campus visits or consultations with faculty.

Program brochures and particularly college viewbooks tend to be 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 than usual among applicants with lower grade averages, particularly those with less than 65% as an average; the opposite is true in regard to results for mail received from admission officers.

Compared to males, female college applicants tend to make more use of institution websites, course calendars, mail from admission officers, and a college's promotional literature. The opposite is true for college and high school coaches, YouTube, MySpace and Twitter.

Compared to males, female college applicants tend to find course calendars, informal campus visits, liaison presentations and education web portals more influential towards making a final choice of college. The reverse is true in regard to Twitter.

College applicants residing in the GTA or Northern Ontario, tend to make more use than average of course calendars, and tend to report that they are more influential in the college decision process. The use of formal campus tours or open houses is lower than average in these same regions.

The influence campus open houses have in refining a college applicant's decision tends to be weaker in the Metro Toronto region than elsewhere.

Over one-third of college applicants find their first-choice college's website to be somewhat, or less than somewhat appealing.

Looking for information about careers or financial aid eligibility plus ordering a brochure/viewbook are the top things college applicants do using institutional websites. In addition to the [Ontariocollege.ca](http://Ontariocollege.ca) website, portals college applicants most frequently use include [Ouac.on.ca](http://Ouac.on.ca), [Edu.gov.on.ca](http://Edu.gov.on.ca), [Studentawards.com](http://Studentawards.com), and [ScholarshipsCanada.com](http://ScholarshipsCanada.com).

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 are the top three items college applicants wish to see in a viewbook.

Similar to results for websites and viewbooks, over one-third of college applicants find their first-choice college's liaison presentation to be somewhat, or less than somewhat appealing.

Email tends to be the format<sup>4</sup> 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, approximately 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 the various media channels, college applicants recall having the most exposure to local newspapers, television/radio ads and billboards.

## 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 accrument of knowledge and earning potential.

Generally, direct entry college applicants are more likely than their counterparts to select any particular reason 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, and difficulty finding a job.

Female college applicants are more likely than males to select many of the reasons featured, particularly the support of personal and intellectual growth, or preparation for future graduate study; however, not being able to find a job, or anything to do, plus raising status in society 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 which have a strong reputation to guide them; however 17% are limited to their local institution due to financial constraints. One in ten applicants are primarily concerned with an institution's overall reputation. The emphasis placed on program reputation is at its highest among applicants interested in 4-year college degree or graduate certificate programs.

The specific college characteristics that continue to have the most impact on the institution selection process are program/college 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 location are other notable factors in this regard.

---

<sup>4</sup> Other formats tested include online, regular mail, phone, and 'in person'.

## Funding

Approximately one-half of college applicants consider themselves to be ‘very much’ concerned about having sufficient funding to complete studies, and the amount of debt they will incur. Applicants with past PSE experience, or those who delayed their entry to PSE tend to be slightly more concerned than their counterparts.

Fifty-three percent of college applicants planned to apply for provincial student aid, and a further 24% were not sure about whether they would apply for this aid. The proportion applying for provincial funding rises to 72% among applicants reporting household incomes of less than \$30,000.

Government loans are the source of funding that is most likely to be a college applicant’s major contributor<sup>5</sup> to covering the cost of their first year of school, followed by personal savings, and then family savings.

---

<sup>5</sup> A major contributor is defined as constituting at least 50% of funds.