

**ONTARIO  
COLLEGES .CA**

# **University/College Applicant Study 2013 UCAS™**

Final Report  
October 2013

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# Introduction and Methodology



## Introduction

- The University/College Applicant Study™ (UCAS™) has been surveying applicants for over 17 years to gain insights into the post-secondary education (PSE) decision-making process. The study includes the measurement of:
  - Applicant demographics, including socio-economic characteristics and educational profile
  - Key decision factors weighed by applicants when they consider a higher education institution (academic, campus, extracurricular, financial, nurturing, outcome and reputation), and the impact of these factors on their application decisions
  - Usage patterns for 30 marketing, recruitment, and media information sources, and the influence of these sources on applicant selection of first-choice institution
  - Sources of funding as well as the level of concern college applicants have around financing their education

## Sections of the Report

### Section 1. Applicant Profile

- This section profiles both demographic and academic characteristics of applicants to Ontario colleges.
- Questions have been added to the survey in recent years that profile academic attitudes and levels of engagement among college applicants.

### Section 2. Key Decision Factors (KDFs)

- This section explores the impact of key decision factors on respondents' decisions to apply to PSE and to a first-choice college.
- Respondents were asked to rate the impact of 48 factors on their decision to choose their first-choice school, on a seven-point scale from strongly negative to strongly positive. The report presents results for factors clustered around the following themes: Reputation, Academic, Financial, Outcome, Campus, Extracurricular, and Nurturing.

### Section 3. Marketing Efforts

- UCAS™ respondents were asked to select the information sources they used when researching their post-secondary options, and to describe the influence of these sources on their decision to choose an institution as their first choice. Please note that some information channels are less relevant to college marketing than they are to the marketing of other types of institutions.

### Section 4. Funding

- The accessibility of college education continues to be an important policy issue. This section examines Ontario college applicants' plans to apply for financial aid, concerns about covering the cost of PSE, and projected sources of funding to pay for their first year of education.

# Methodology

## Procedure

- A total of 62,757 full-time applicants to Ontario colleges were selected to participate in the 2013 UCAS™: 59,536 English-speaking applicants randomly drawn from the English-speaking pool and almost the entire French-speaking applicant pool of 3,221 applicants at the time of survey administration.
- Academica Group provided unique IDs and passwords as well as the invitation email text to the Ontario College Application Service (OCAS). OCAS then sent the survey invitation email to college applicants. Applicant contact information was not shared with Academica Group at any point in the process.
- The survey was in-field from March 19 to April 22, 2013. Reminder emails were sent on April 3 and April 12 to those who had not yet responded. In order to boost response rates, respondents were entered into a draw to win over \$10,000 in prizes.
- 11,557 college respondents completed the survey (11,016 English and 541 French) providing an overall response rate of 18%.
- This sample size provides results at the 95% confidence level of plus or minus 0.87 percentage points.
- Respondent data was weighted by gender and language to reflect the original population invited to participate.

# Overall Summary



## Overall Summary

### Demographic Profile of College Applicants

- Applicants to Ontario colleges tend to skew female (56%) and under 25 years of age (79%). The average age of college applicants is 22.2 years. Small proportions are married (11%) and have dependent children (9%).
- Fifty-nine percent of Ontario college applicants are working – 40% part-time and 19% full-time. More than one-third are not working (28% of applicants are looking for work, and 7% choose not to look for work).
- In terms of the regional distribution, approximately one-quarter of Ontario college applicants are from each of Southwestern Ontario (23%) and Central Ontario (22%), while 16% are from the GTA and 15% from Metro Toronto. Sixteen percent are from Eastern Ontario, and a small proportion of college applicants are from Northern Ontario (7%).
- The majority of all respondents (83%) are Canadian born. Of the 16% who are immigrants, more than one-third arrived in Canada between 2007 and 2013. English is the language most spoken at home for 84% of applicants. The next most spoken language at home is French (3%).
- Just over half of Ontario college applicants report being Caucasian/white (57%), while 22% belong to a visible minority group; another 7% report a mixed background (selected two or more groups). Black (9%), South Asian (5%), Caribbean/West Indies and Chinese (5% each) students constitute the largest groups reporting a visible minority background. Five percent of applicants to Ontario Colleges are Aboriginal.
- Twelve percent of all applicants report having at least one form of disability; 7% report a learning disability, 4% a mental health disability and 2% a physical disability.



## Overall Summary

### Academic Profile of College Applicants

- Forty percent of all Ontario college applicants are direct entrants, 15% are delayed entrants, 29% are PSE transfer students, and 16% have past PSE experience.
- A majority of students (84%) applied to colleges only, while 16% applied to both colleges and universities.
- Over one-third of Ontario college applicants (39%) attended high school full-time or part-time at the time of application. Just over one-quarter (26%) had some past post-secondary education, either college or university; 27% were not attending any school.
- The majority of applicants attended a public high school (no religious affiliation – 65%; religious affiliation – 30%); only 4% attended a private school.
- Close to two-thirds of Ontario college applicants (63%) plan to obtain a college certificate, diploma, or degree as their highest credential, but a significant proportion are planning on obtaining university credentials including an undergraduate (15%), professional (1% Teaching, 1 % Law, 2% Medical) or graduate degree (6% Master's, 2% MBA, and 2% PhD).
- The most popular programs among all Ontario college applicants are health sciences/kinesiology/nursing (26%), art and design (11%), business (10%), skilled trades/applied technologies/apprenticeship (9%), social and community services (9%), engineering/architecture (6%) and law enforcement (5%).
- The average high school grade average among Ontario college applicants (self-reported) was 77.6% with over half of students falling between the 75% and 84% range (51%).
- A majority of Ontario college applicants (74%) are not first-generation students; 21% are first generation, that is, neither parent had participated in post-secondary education.

## Overall Summary

### Interest in Studying Abroad

- Fourteen percent of all applicants to Ontario colleges either considered or applied to a post-secondary institution outside of Canada. The United States, the United Kingdom and Australia are the most popular destinations among this group, with 62% considering the US , 38% considering Australia and 37% considering the UK. Five percent had applied to an institution in the US.
- When asked about the appeal of particular study destinations, applicants rated Australia and the United Kingdom as the most appealing, followed by the New Zealand, United States, France, and China.

### Academic Engagement

- Over three-quarters of all Ontario college applicants are “very” or “quite” certain that their chosen academic program is a path to a satisfying career (78%), and that it is right for them (78%).
- Over half of students expect to very/frequently speak with an instructor about class work or grades (62%), speak in class and participate (61%), receive early feedback from an instructor about class performance (60%), learn something that will change their perceptions of issues (60%), work on a team in class to complete projects (60%), and meet with students outside of class to work on an assignment (54%).
- A majority of Ontario college students see college as a place to develop career preparedness (92% very or quite important) and academic skills (87%). Important, but to a lesser extent, is the ability to develop analytical skills (81%), creativity (74%) and social skills (70%).
- In terms of information or orientation activities, over half of applicants consider career counseling (62%) and financial aid advising (55%) useful as they enter their first year. Forty-seven percent consider library/research/learning skills tutorials useful, 46% feel program course or transfer planning is useful, and 39% consider information about student services and activities useful for their first year.

# Overall Summary

## Key Decision Factors in Choosing First-choice Institution

- For 35% of applicants, the single most important reason for choosing an institution is the reputation of the program. Twenty-one percent choose an institution for its proximity to home, while 18% consider the reputation of the school in terms of graduate employment outcomes.
- Respondents were asked to rate the impact of 48 factors on their decision to choose their first-choice school, on a seven-point scale from strongly negative to strongly positive (-3, 0 , +3).
- The report presents results for factors clustered around the following themes: Reputation, Academic, Financial, Outcome, Campus, Extracurricular, and Nurturing.
- The top ten key decision factors among Ontario college applicants include:
  - Graduates get high-quality jobs (Outcome)
  - Academic reputation of program/major (Reputation)
  - Academic reputation of institution (Reputation)
  - Reputation for student experience (Extracurricular)
  - Co-op programs/internships (Outcome)
  - Quality of faculty (Academic)
  - Institution is close to home (Financial)
  - Professor/instructor-student interaction (Nurturing)
  - Attractive campus (Campus)
  - Investments in latest technology & equipment (Academic)

## Overall Summary

### Key Decision Factors in Choosing First-choice Institution

- **Reputation Factors:** While history and tradition impact some applicants' decision to choose their first-choice institution (45%), academic reputation of the program/major (74%) and reputation of the institution (74%) are the two most impactful reputation factors. Institution and guidebook rankings has the least impact, with 58% indicating that it did not impact their decision.
- **Academic Factors:** Academic factors that had the most positive impact on applicants choosing their first-choice institution were the quality of faculty (69%) and investments in the latest technology and equipment (59%). Library collections and facilities and high profile research had the next highest impact (48% and 41%), while special programs for the academically gifted was the least impactful (21%).
- **Financial Factors:** Sixty-five percent of applicants said that their first-choice institution being close to home had a positive impact on their decision, followed by tuition costs (53%). Around half said the costs of attending, not including tuition (51%), the availability of needs-based scholarships (50%), and flexible course delivery (49%) had a positive impact on their decision. The availability of merit-based scholarships is the least impactful financial factor, with only 36% of applicants saying it had a positive impact.
- **Outcome Factors:** The most impactful outcome factors according to Ontario college applicants were graduates obtaining high-quality jobs (78%), and co-op programs and internships (64%). Applicants also ranked relevant industry in the area (57%), and graduates getting into top professional and grad schools (54%) as having a positive impact. International exchange options had the least impact on applicants' choice of institution (24%).

## Overall Summary

### Key Decision Factors in Choosing First-choice Institution

- **Campus Factors:** Sixty-four percent of Ontario college applicants reported that an attractive campus had a positive impact on their decision. Diversity of student population and the availability of off-campus housing both had a fairly positive impact (44% and 36%), while attending the same school as parents had the least positive impact (11%).
- **Extracurricular Factors:** Reputation for student experience had the most positive impact of all extracurricular factors (69%). Recreational sports facilities (51%), off-campus life (45%) and clubs/social activities (43%) were somewhat impactful, while the majority of applicants did not find varsity athletic teams to have a significant impact.
- **Nurturing Factors:** Professor-student interaction had the most positive impact compared with other nurturing factors (62%), followed by small class sizes (56%), personal attention during the admission process (52%) and campus security (51%).

## Overall Summary

### Use of Marketing Efforts

- The most commonly used information sources among all Ontario college applicants include websites and web portals (97%), recruitment activities or direct contacts with the institution (89%), recommendations (80%) and print materials (78%). Smaller proportions use social media (32%) and media rankings (13%).
  - Individually, the most important factors include: institution websites (90%), education web portals (89%), email communication from admissions officers (68%), college viewbooks (62%), recommendations from current students or graduates (56%), friends (53%), faculty/program brochures (53%), and mail communication from admissions officers (52%).
- Viewbooks are used most for academic information (86%), career/future plans (77%), cost/finances (73%) and campus information (64%). Individually, the most important features include: program and course descriptions (62%), information about tuition and fees (57%), career possibilities (56%), and admission requirements (52%).
- More than half of applicants said their parents reviewed their viewbooks, brochures or calendars (53%).
- Among applicants who used an institutional calendar, three-quarters accessed it online (78%), while 14% picked it up at a guidance counsellor's office, and 7% received it by mail.
- The most frequented web portal by a large margin is ontariocolleges.ca (86%). Studentawards.com (19%). Scholarshipscanada.com (15%) and schoolfinder.com (11%) are the only other web portals that are used by more than one-tenth of applicants to Ontario colleges.

## Overall Summary

### Influence of Marketing Efforts

- Overall, the information sources most widely used were also the most influential. These included institution websites, emails from admission officers, viewbooks, and current students or graduates. Friends, mail from admission officers and program brochures also ranked high in terms of influence.
- While relatively small proportions of applicants reported attending campus open houses and formal campus tours, those who did rated them as very influential in selecting their first-choice institution. Liaison presentations, informal campus visits and speaking with professors were also lowly utilized but ranked high in influence. Phone calls from admission officers, along with various social media were less influential.

### Technology Ownership

- A majority of applicants (80%) own a laptop, with a Windows operating system being the most common (63%). More than three-quarters own a smartphone (82%), with the iPhone being the most popular (37%). Twenty-one percent currently own some form of tablet, with iPad leading at 14%.

## Overall Summary

### Funding

- Sixty percent of applicants to Ontario colleges plan on applying to a provincial student aid program (provincial government student loan) to help finance their education, while 21% are not planning on applying for aid.
- Overall, applicants to Ontario colleges are concerned about funding their education. Approximately three-quarters of applicants are very much/somewhat concerned about the availability of bursaries and student loans (77%), having sufficient funding to complete education (76%), the amount of debt they might incur (75%), and the ability to repay debt within a reasonable time frame (72%).
- Overall, personal savings (78%), government student grants and loans (64%), and parents/family (62%) are the largest contributors to first year education costs among all applicants to Ontario colleges. Just over half are funded by college financial aid in the form of scholarships and 43% are funded by other types of scholarships/bursaries. Only 19% selected private loans as a contributor to their first year education.