

2008 UCASTM University & College Applicant StudyTM

Colleges Ontario
System-Level Report
Summary

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Introduction

Market intelligence that provides actionable insights and valuable context for PSE institutional marketing and student recruitment.

Now in its twelfth year, Academica Group's *UCAS Applicant Study™* provides colleges and universities with unparalleled market research and competitive intelligence for student recruitment. Other data sources track application volumes and trends, or survey existing undergraduate students for engagement, but there is no other comprehensive study examining the attitudes and perceptions of PSE applicants *prior to enrolment*. The UCAS™ delivers key insights on the demographic, academic and psychographic profile of applicants, their use of marketing and recruitment information sources, the influence of those sources, key decision factors in the PSE institution selection process, and institutional reputation and brand associations for Canadian institutions. As always, the UCAS™ provides actionable, strategic intelligence to support evidence-based planning by a range of departments on campus, from admissions, recruitment and marketing personnel to senior administration.

This year's UCAS™ is the largest iteration yet, surveying over 160,000 applicants to more than 40 colleges and universities across Canada. By surveying both college *and* university applicants with a single instrument, and compiling response data in a common warehouse, the UCAS™ now better reflects the reality that PSE is a spectrum of educational pathways, with increasingly subtle distinctions and complex collaborations between colleges, polytechnics, and universities. Institutional reports can still be generated focusing exclusively on university-bound applicants, but data regarding college cross-applicants are better captured through the new approach.

Applicant Profile

Ontario college applicants consider a range of community colleges when selecting a post-secondary educational institution, but 16% also applies to university.

The typical applicant to an Ontario college is female, aged 18 or younger, most likely working part-time and residing in households reporting incomes of \$60,000 or less. She attended a public high school, and reports a high school grade average in the B range (70-79%). She is seeking either a 2- or 3-year diploma, and is interested in programs in Health Sciences, Business, and Social and Community Services.

Gender: 56% of Ontario college applicants overall are female, with a similar gender distribution among first-choice applicants.

Age: Nearly half of Ontario college applicants are aged 18 or younger (49%). More than one-third are between the ages of 19 to 24 (37%), and 14% are 25 or older. Two-thirds of French language Ontario college applicants are 18 or younger (68%).

Geography: About three in 10 of Ontario college applicants are from the GTA and Toronto (39%) and almost one-quarter (23%) are from Southwestern Ontario. One-fifth of applicants (21%) are from Central Ontario. Half of Ontario college applicants plan to commute to school (49%). More than one-third of French language applicants come from Eastern Ontario (38%), and almost the same proportion come from Eastern Canada (36%).

Income: Half of Ontario college applicants (52%) come from households that earn less than \$60,000 per year, and one-quarter (25%) from high-income households (more than \$90,000).

Employment: One half of all Ontario college applicants are engaged in part-time employment when they apply (49%), and another 22% are working full-time. French language applicants are more likely to be working part-time and less likely to be working full-time than their English language counterparts.

Language: More than eight out of 10 Ontario college applicants, report English as their first language (85%). Among applicants requesting French language correspondence from OCAS, 90% indicated that their first language was French while 7% indicate they learned to speak English.

Education: More than half of all college applicants (56%) were in high school at the time of their application, however, one-fifth were not attending any school at all (21%). Among Ontario college applicants, two-thirds attended a public high school (67%) and 29% a Catholic high school. Half of French language applicants (49%) attended a Catholic high school, more than the 44% that went to a public high school.

Grade Averages: Almost half of all Ontario college applicants (45%) have high school grade averages in the B range (70-79%), with slightly more French language applicants reporting grades in this range than English language applicants (55% vs. 45%).

Academic Plans: 22% of Ontario college applicants are applying to Health Sciences, 13% to Business, and 12% to Social and Community Services. French language applicants are more interested in Applied Technology, and Communications and Journalism courses than their English language counterparts. About three-fifths of all Ontario college applicants (59%) intend to obtain a college diploma or an advance college diploma and one-fifth plan to complete their education with a Bachelor's degree. French language applicants are more interested than English language applicants in obtaining an Applied Degree from college and less interested in a Bachelor's degree.

Marketing Efforts

The 2008 UCAS™ reviews the use and influence of 20 different information sources and institutional marketing efforts, and finds that French language applicants tend to use many information sources more than English language applicants, and are more or equally influenced by the sources they consult.

Ontario college applicants make the greatest use of education-related web portals as sources of information, and rate them “fairly high” in influencing their decision of a post-secondary institution.

Web portals are the preferred sources of post-secondary information for Ontario college applicants. More than nine out of 10 (92%) refer to them but remain a “fairly high” influencer for applicants when deciding on their PSE institution (3.5 mean influence score out of 5.0).

Institutional websites rate as the next highest sources of information for 80% of Ontario college applicants, however, English language applicants are less likely than French language applicants to use websites (80% vs. 88%). They are considered to be among the most influential of all sources of information, for both English and French language applicants (mean score of 4.1 each).

Print materials continue to be widely used by Ontario college applicants and they are rated as highly influential. French language applicants make more use of these sources, and are more influenced by them than English language applicants.

French language applicants make more use of print publications, especially program brochures, than English language applicants. About 76% read program-specific or faculty brochures and 68% read institutional viewbooks. They are more influenced by program brochures than English language applicants, but rate the influence they ascribe to viewbooks similarly.

More than four out of five Ontario college applicants who use viewbooks (86%) look at more than one publication; 42% scan at least four. The greatest proportion of both English and French language Ontario college applicants (39%) receives PSE viewbooks from their guidance counsellors. With regards to what information should be included in viewbooks, both French and English language Ontario college applicants emphasize the importance of program descriptions in viewbooks, but French language applicants find faculty bios the most important aspect. Admission requirements, tuition and fee schedules, and career possibilities are among the most important viewbook components for English language applicants.

Almost three-quarters of Ontario college applicants used course calendars (72%), the greatest proportion (38%) of which accessed the calendar both online and in print form, while only 10% depended solely on a print version.

French language Ontario college applicants use and are more influenced by email, mail, and telephone contact than their English language counterparts.

For each type of contact, usage rates among English language Ontario college applicants are lower than the French language applicant rates for email contact (62% vs. 44%), for mail contact (54% vs. 46%), and for phone contact (30% vs. 25%). French language Ontario college applicants also ascribe greater influence to all three than English language applicants, and rate mail contact the most influential (mean score of 4.1). Overall, 64% of Ontario college applicants prefer to receive correspondence by email, but 33% prefer regular mail.

Liaison presentations are not only used more often by French language applicants than their English language counterparts, but they are also considered to be more influential and more appealing to them.

Three-fifths of French language Ontario college applicants attend liaison presentations at their high schools, more than the one-third of English language applicants that attend. These presentations are also considered to be highly influential by French language applicants (mean score of 4.1), greater than the 3.6 mean score given by English language applicants.

More than three-quarters of Ontario college applicants who attend liaison events participate in two or more presentations; 37% attend four or more. English language applicants are more likely than their French counterparts to attend seven or more presentations (11% vs. 5%).

Half of Ontario college applicants (50%) found these presentations “very” appealing. Half of the French language applicants (49%) found the liaison presentations “completely” appealing, more than double the amount of English language applicants who felt this way (22%).

Overall, half of Ontario college applicants (51%) did not visit any college before deciding where to apply but, when separated by language, French language applicants were less likely to do this than their English language counterparts. French language applicants take more formal campus tours, and attend more open houses than English language applicants, and are also more influenced by both.

Visiting colleges before deciding where to apply was not important for half of English language applicants, but more than French language applicants (52% vs. 39%). French language applicants are more likely to visit one or two campuses before applying than English language applicants (52% vs. 37%).

Almost two-fifths (39%) of French language applicants take formal tours of the college they are considering compared to one-quarter (28%) of English language applicants. Campus open houses are also more commonly attended by French language applicants (43%) than English language applicants (34%). French language applicants rate formal tours the highest of all information sources (mean score of 4.3), but English language applicants also ascribe high levels of influence (mean score of 3.9). Open houses are highly influential for both English language and French language applicants (mean scores of 4.0 and 4.3).

Key Decision Factors

The majority of Ontario college applicants are motivated by career outcomes in their decision to pursue a post-secondary education, and emphasize program reputation over institutional reputation.

For three out of five Ontario college applicants, applying to PSE is a practical and goal-oriented decision: 42% indicate that their single, main reason for pursuing a college education is “career preparation,” 13% attend for “career advancement,” and another 9% apply for “career change.” When comparing English and French language applicants, English applicants are more likely to identify career change and earning potential as the main reason for applying to Ontario colleges while French language applicants are more likely to site personal development and career advancement.

More than half of all Ontario college applicants (55%) seek institutions with strong reputations in their desired program, and almost one in five (18%) consider the institution’s overall reputation to be more crucial. When compared by preferred language of correspondence, English language applicants are more likely to identify program reputation as the primary driver of institutional choice while French language applicants are more likely to base their decision on the reputation of the institution.

Applicants consider Ontario colleges to be particularly attractive for the reputation of their programs, the overall academic reputation of the institutions, graduate employment outcomes, reputation for student experience, the availability of co-op programs and internships, accessibility by public transit, and having relevant industry in the area.

French language applicants to Ontario colleges generally assign higher mean positive impact scores than do English language applicants to almost all factors related to academics, finances and outcomes.

When compared to English language applicants, French language applicants are more impacted by the various Ontario colleges’ small student population, having guaranteed scholarships at specific grade levels, the completion rates for students, the number of postgraduate programs, the availability of entrance bursaries, having school spirit, and the size of the scholarship offered. English language applicants are more likely to be impacted by innovative teaching methods, and safety on campus than their French language counterparts.

Applicant Funding

Almost half of Ontario college applicants are “very much” concerned about the various monetary aspects experienced when attending PSE. About three-quarters will be seeking financial aid, but while one-third expect that government loans will contribute to at least 50% of their PSE costs, more expect their personal savings or family loans will be major contributors.

For half of the applicants to Ontario colleges, having sufficient funding, being able to repay their loan, and considering how much debt they are going to incur are monetary aspects that “very much” concern them. Four in 10 applicants are “very much” concerned about the availability of student loans and bursaries. Overall three-quarters of applicants are either “somewhat” or “very much” concerned about all four funding issues.

About two-thirds of Ontario college applicants are planning to apply for financial aid, and another 6% already had at the time the survey was conducted. French language applicants are slightly more likely to apply for financial aid than their English language counterparts.

The greatest proportion of parents and family member contributions are expected to be major contributions (contribute more than 50%) to applicants PSE, while the greatest proportion of applicants’ personal savings are expected to be minor contributors (less than 50%). Three-quarters of applicants expect private loans to not contribute at all, while government loans are more evenly split between being major contributors, minor contributors, and not contributing at all. Fewer English language applicants expect other sources to be major contributors to their education costs than French language applicants.