

**ONTARIO
COLLEGES .CA**

University/College Applicant Study 2015 UCAS™

Final Report

November 2016

Introduction and Methodology



Introduction

- The University/College Applicant Study™ (UCAS™) has been surveying applicants for over 19 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 PSE 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.

Section 2. Key Decision Factors

- 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 65,804 full-time applicants to Ontario colleges opted-in to participate in the 2016 UCAS™: 63,919 English-speaking applicants and 1,885 French-speaking applicants at the time of survey administration.
- Academica Group provided unique web links 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 10 to April 17, 2016. Reminder emails were sent on March 24 and April 6 to those who had not yet responded. Respondents who completed the survey were entered into a draw to win over \$5,000 in prizes.
- 14,999 college respondents completed the survey (14,378 English and 621 French) providing an overall response rate of 23%.
- This sample size provides results at the 95% confidence level of plus or minus 0.7 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

- More than half of applicants are female (56%). 59% are under the age of 20, while nearly one-quarter are 20 to 24 (22%), and 20% are 25 or older. The average age is 21.9 years. Small proportions are married (13%) and have dependent children (10%).
- Sixty percent of applicants are working – 43% part-time and 17% full-time. One-third are not working, with 26% of applicants looking for work, and 7% choosing not to look for work.
- In terms of the regional distribution, one-fifth of Ontario college applicants are from each of central Ontario (21%) and southwestern Ontario (21%), while 15% are from Metro Toronto, 15% are from Greater Toronto Area and 16% are from Eastern Ontario. A small proportion of college applicants are from northern Ontario (6%).
- The majority of all respondents (78%) are Canadian born, while 20% are immigrants. Among immigrants, 44% had arrived in Canada recently (since 2010). English is the majority language, with 80% reporting English as the language most spoken at home. The next most spoken language at home is French (3%).
- More than half of applicants report being Caucasian/white (56%), while 29% belong to a visible minority group; another four percent report a mixed background (selected two or more groups). Six percent of applicants are Aboriginal. Black (10%), South Asian (7%), Caribbean (6%) and Filipino (5%) students constitute the largest groups reporting a visible minority background.
- Sixteen percent of all applicants report having at least one form of disability; 8% report having a learning disability, 7% a mental health disability and 2% a physical disability.

Overall Summary

Academic Profile of College Applicants

- Half of all Ontario college applicants are direct entrants (49%), 15% are delayed entrants, 23% are PSE transfer students, and 13% have past PSE experience.
- Twelve percent of applicants applied to a university in addition to applying to a college or polytechnic.
- Fifty-two percent of applicants were attending high school at the time of application. Nearly one-fifth (19%) had some past post-secondary education, either college, polytechnic or university; 22% were not attending any school.
- The majority of applicants attended a public high school (no religious affiliation – 63%; religious affiliation – 30%); only 6% attended a private school (no religious affiliation – 4%; religious affiliation – 2%).
- More than half of applicants (55%) plan to obtain a certificate, diploma or advanced diploma as their highest credential, but a significant proportion are planning on a bachelor's degree (21%), or graduate degree (5% Master's and 2% PhD).
- The most popular programs among all applicants are health sciences/kinesiology/nursing (25%), social & community services (11%), business (10%), fine art and design (9%), and skilled trades/applied technologies/apprenticeship (8%).
- The mean self-reported high school grade average among applicants was 78.0% with half of students falling between the 75% and 84% range (51%).
- A majority of applicants (72%) are not first-generation students; 21% are first generation, that is, neither parent had *participated* in post-secondary education.

Overall Summary

Academic Choices & Delivery Preferences

- Four-fifths of Ontario college applicants are “very” or “quite” certain that their chosen academic program is a path to a satisfying career (81%), and that it is right for them (80%).
- The majority of Ontario college applicants prefer a full-time course load (81%), while 6% would prefer a part-time course load and 5% preferring a condensed schedule. Three-quarters would prefer being taught only in-class (76%), while 17% would like a mix of in-class and online learning.
- 84% of Ontario college applicants prefer to go to class during traditional learning hours, 6% prefer weekday evening classes, while 2% prefer weekend classes.

Overall Summary

Key Decision Factors in Choosing First-choice Institution

- For one-third (34%) of applicants, the single most important reason for choosing an institution is the reputation of the program. Twenty-one percent consider the reputation of the school in terms of graduate employment outcomes, while 18% choose an institution for its proximity to home.
- 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 are:
 - Graduates get high-quality jobs (Outcome)
 - Academic reputation of program/major (Reputation)
 - Academic reputation of institution (Reputation)
 - Quality of faculty (Academic)
 - Reputation for student experience (Extracurricular)
 - Co-op programs/internships (Outcome)
 - Professor/instructor-student interaction (Nurturing)
 - Attractive campus (Campus)
 - Institution is close to home (Financial)
 - Investments in latest technology & equipment (Academic)

Overall Summary

Key Decision Factors in Choosing First-choice Institution

- **Reputation Factors:** Academic reputation of the program/major (75%) and reputation of the institution (73%) are the two most impactful reputation factors. Institution and guidebook rankings and history/tradition has the least impact, with 50% indicating no impact on their decision.
- **Academic Factors:** Academic factors that had the most positive impact on applicants choosing their first-choice institution were the quality of faculty (74%) and investments in the latest technology and equipment (63%). Library collections and facilities and high-profile research had the next highest impact (55% and 45%, respectively), while special programs for the academically gifted was the least impactful (69% indicating no impact).
- **Financial Factors:** Sixty-four percent of applicants said that their first-choice institution being close to home had a positive impact on their decision, followed availability of needs-based financial aid (56%), flexible course delivery (55%), and tuition costs (54%). The availability of merit-based scholarships is the least impactful financial factor, with only 40% of applicants saying it had a positive impact, and 55% stating it had no impact at all.
- **Outcome Factors:** The most positively impactful outcome factors according to Ontario college applicants were graduates obtaining high-quality jobs (81%), and co-op programs and internships (69%). Applicants also ranked relevant industry in the area (60%), and graduates getting into top grad schools (59%) as having a positive impact. International exchange options had the least impact on applicants' choice of institution (68% stated no impact).

Overall Summary

Key Decision Factors in Choosing First-choice Institution (continued)

- **Campus Factors:** Sixty-nine percent of Ontario college applicants reported that an attractive campus had a positive impact on their decision to attend their first-choice institution. Diversity of student population and the availability of off-campus housing both had a fairly positive impact (51% and 38%, respectively), while attending the same school as their parents had the least positive impact.
- **Extracurricular Factors:** Reputation for student experience had the most positive impact of all extracurricular factors (73%). Recreational sports facilities (54%), off-campus urban life (48%) and clubs and social activities (48%) were somewhat positively impactful, while the majority of applicants (62%) 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 (68%), followed by campus safety and security (60%), small class sizes (59%), and personal attention during the application process (56%).

Overall Summary

Use of Marketing Materials

- The most commonly used type of information sources among all Ontario college applicants include websites and web portals (95%), recruitment activities or direct contacts with the institution (78%), recommendations (66%), institution-specific materials (6s%) and social media (46%). Much smaller proportions used media rankings (7%). Individually, the most important factors include: education-related web portals (89%), institution websites (68%), email communication from institution (50%), and institution viewbooks (50%).
- The majority of applicants use institution websites for checking admission status (57%), followed by searching for career information (51%). Smaller proportions use websites to check financial eligibility (39%), review FAQs (38%), take a virtual tour (37%), watch videos (36%), browse list of academic majors (35%), and book a campus tour or visit (33%).
- Viewbooks are used most for academic information (85), career/future plans (79%), cost/finances (73%) and campus information (63%). Individually, the most important features include: program and course descriptions (61%), career possibilities (58%), information about tuition and fees (57%), and detailed admission requirements (52%).
- More than half of applicants said their parents reviewed their viewbooks, brochures or calendars (57%).
- Among applicants who responded as to where they accessed their first-choice viewbook, 24% picked it up at the guidance counsellor's office, 19% received it at a presentation at their high school, and 17% picked it up at a university or college fair.
- The most frequented web portal by a large margin is ontariocolleges.ca (86%). ScholarshipsCanada.com (17%), Studentawards.com (10%) and Schoolfinder.com (10%) 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

- Rated on an influence scale from 1 to 5 where 1 means not at all influential and 5 means very much influential, the most influential marketing channels for Ontario college applicants were campus open houses (4.5), formal tours (4.5), and talking to a professor (4.4). Rated 4.3 out of 5.0 were talking to students or graduates, institution websites, informal visits to campus, and talking to a college coach about athletics.

Technology Ownership

- A majority of respondents use a smartphone (91%), with iPhone being the most popular (51%) followed by Android (38%). Sixty-eight percent of applicants use a laptop, with Windows being the most common (48%). Twenty-nine percent currently use some form of tablet, with iPad leading at 21%.

Overall Summary

Funding

- More than half of applicants to Ontario colleges (58%) plan on applying to a provincial student aid program (provincial government student loan) to help finance their education. Nineteen percent do not plan on applying for aid.
- Overall, applicants to Ontario colleges are generally concerned about funding their education. Nearly three-quarters of applicants are very much/somewhat concerned about having sufficient funding to complete PSE and the amount of debt they might incur (73% and 72%, respectively), the availability of bursaries and student loans (72%), and their ability to repay the debt within a reasonable timeframe (69%).
- Personal savings (30%), government loans (26%), and parents/family (26%) are the largest contributors to first year education costs among all applicants to Ontario colleges. Ten percent expect to fund first year through financial aid from an institution, five percent through other scholarships and bursaries, and three percent through private loans.