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# University/College Applicant Study 2012 UCAS™

Final Report  
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# Introduction and Methodology

## Introduction

- The University/College Applicant Study™ (UCAS™) has been surveying applicants for over 15 years to gain insights into the post-secondary education decision-making process. The study includes the measurement of:
  - Applicant demographics, including socio-economic characteristics and educational profile
  - Key decision factors (academic, campus, extracurricular, financial, nurturing, outcome and reputation) weighed by applicants when they consider a higher education institution, 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

# Methodology

## Procedure

- Academica Group provided unique IDs and passwords, and the invitation email to Ontario College Application Services (OCAS), which administered the online UCAS™ survey 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 14 to April 16, 2012. Reminder emails were sent on March 27 and April 5 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.
- A total of 65,253 full-time applicants to Ontario colleges were selected to participate in the 2012 UCAS™: 62,096 English-speaking applicants randomly drawn from the English-speaking pool and almost the entire French-speaking applicant pool of 3,157 applicants at the time of survey administration.
- 11,451 college respondents completed the survey (10,921 English and 530 French) providing an overall response rate of 18%.
- This sample size provides results at the 95% confidence level of plus or minus 0.8%.
- Respondent data was weighted by gender and language to reflect the original population invited to participate.

# Overall Summary

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## Demographic Profile of College Applicants

- Applicants to Ontario colleges tend to skew female (56%) and under 25 years of age (81%). The average age of college applicants is 22.1 years. Small proportions are married and have dependent children (10% each).
- Sixty-one percent of Ontario college applicants are working – 41% part-time and 20% full-time. One-third are not working (27% of applicants looking for work, and 5% choosing 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 14% are from each of Metro Toronto and Greater Toronto Area, and 16% from Eastern Ontario. A small proportion of college applicants are from Northern Ontario (6%).
- The majority of all applicants to Ontario colleges (82%) are Canadian born. Of the 16% who are immigrants, almost half arrived recently between 2006 and 2011. English is the majority language, with 84% reporting it as the language most spoken at home. The next most spoken language at home is French (3%).
- Just over half of Ontario college applicants report being Caucasian/white (54%), while twenty-two percent belong to a visible minority group; another 10% report a mixed background (selected two or more groups). Black (11%), South Asian (7%) and Chinese (7%) students constitute the largest groups reporting a visible minority background. Four percent of applicants to Ontario Colleges are Aboriginal.
- Eleven percent of all applicants report having at least one form of disability; 7% report a learning disability, 3% a mental health disability and 2% a physical disability.

## Overall Summary

### Academic Profile of College Applicants

- Over one-third of all Ontario college applicants are direct entrants (37%), 17% are delayed entrants, 31% are PSE transfer students, and 15% have past PSE experience.
- A majority of students (88%) applied to colleges only, while 12% applied to both colleges and universities.
- Over one-third of Ontario college applicants (40%) attended high school full-time or part-time at the time of application. Just over one-quarter (28%) 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 – 28%); only 6% attended a private school.
- Over half of Ontario college applicants (59%) plan to obtain a college diploma or degree as their highest credential, but a significant proportion are planning on obtaining higher credentials including a University undergraduate (14%), or graduate degree (6% Master's, 2% Medical and 2% PhD).
- The most popular programs among all Ontario college applicants are health sciences/kinesiology/nursing (28%), art and design (11%), business (8%), social and community services (8%) and skilled trades/applied technologies/apprenticeship (6%), law enforcement (5%), engineering/architecture (5%) and hospitality/tourism/culinary (5%).
- The average high school grade average among Ontario college applicants (self-reported) was 77.0% with almost half of students falling between the 75% and 84% range (49%).
- A majority of Ontario college applicants (72%) are not first-generation students; 23% are first generation, that is, neither parent had participated in/completed post-secondary education.

## Overall Summary

### Academic Engagement

- Over three-quarters of all Ontario colleges 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%).
- A good proportion of students expect to be engaged in their first year of college. Over half of students expect to very/frequently speak in class and participate (61%), receive early feedback from an instructor about class performance (61%), speak with instructor about class work or grades (61%), work on a team in class to complete projects (60%), and learn something that will change their perceptions of issues (59%).
- A majority of Ontario college students see college as a place to develop career preparedness (90% rated “very” or “quite important”) and academic skills (86%). Important, but to a lesser extent, is the ability to develop analytical skills (78%), creativity (73%) and social skills (69%).

### Interest in Studying Abroad

- When asked about the appeal of particular study destinations, applicants chose Australia and the United Kingdom as their top choices, followed by the New Zealand, United States, France, and China.
- 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 66% considering the US , 41% considering Australia and 39% considering the UK. Five percent had applied to an institution in the US.

## Overall Summary

- **The single most important reason** for choosing an institution is the reputation of the program among 35% of all applicants to Ontario colleges. Twenty percent choose an institution for its proximity to home, while 19% consider the reputation of the school in terms of graduates getting good jobs.

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

- 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 decisions among Ontario college applicants include:
  1. Graduates get high-quality jobs (Outcome factor)
  2. Academic reputation of program/major (Reputation factor)
  3. Academic reputation of institution (Reputation factor)
  4. Reputation for student experience (Extracurricular factor)
  5. Quality of faculty (Academic Factor)
  6. Co-op programs/internships (Outcome Factor)
  7. Institution is close to home (Financial Factor)
  8. Attractive campus (Campus Factor)
  9. Professor/instructor-student interaction (Nurturing Factor)
  10. Investments in latest technology & equipment (Academic Factor)

## Overall Summary

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

- **Reputation Factors:** While history and tradition (45%) had an impact on applicants' decision to choose their first-choice institution, academic reputation of the program/major (75%) and reputation of the institution (74%) are the two most impactful. Institution and guidebook rankings has the least impact, with only 36% rating it as having a positive impact.
- **Academic Factors:** Academic factors that had the most impact on applicants choosing their first-choice institution were the quality of faculty (68%) and investments in the latest technology and equipment (59%). Library collections and facilities and high profile research had the next highest impact (49% and 39%), while special programs for the academically gifted was the least impactful (20%).
- **Financial Factors:** Over 60% of applicants said that the proximity of their first-choice institution had a positive impact on their decision, while 15% indicated it was too close to home. Around half said the costs of attending, not including tuition (52%), the availability of needs-based scholarships (50%), and flexible course delivery (48%) had a positive impact on their decision. The availability of merit-based scholarships is the least impactful financial factor, with only 37% 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 (56%), and graduates getting into top grad schools (55%) as having a positive impact. Overall, international exchange options had the least to no impact.

## Overall Summary

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

- **Campus Factors:** Overall, significant proportions did not place much emphasis on campus factors. That said, 65% of Ontario college applicants found an attractive campus to be a positive impact on their decision. Diversity of student population and the availability of off-campus housing both had a fairly positive impact (43% and 36%). The one factor that had some negative impact was the size of the institution (12% rated it as having a negative impact).
- **Extracurricular Factors:** Reputation for student experience had the most positive impact of all extracurricular factors (69%). Recreational sports facilities (51%), off-campus life (46%) 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 (61%), followed by small class sizes (57%), campus security (52%) and personal attention during the admission process (52%).

## Overall Summary

### Use of Marketing Efforts

- The most commonly used type of information sources among all Ontario college applicants include websites and web portals (98%), recruitment activities or direct contacts with the institution (90%), print materials (82%), and recommendations (81%). Smaller proportions use social media (33%) and media rankings (12%). Very few use alumni mailings, Wiki, high school/college coaches, or media rankings as sources of information,).
  - Individually, the most important factors include: institution websites (92%), education web portals (90%), email communication from admissions officers (69%), college viewbooks (67%), recommendations from current students or graduates (57%), friends (56%), faculty/program brochures (55%), and mail communication from admissions officers (55%).
- Viewbooks are used most for academic information (85%), career/future plans (76%), cost/finances (72%) and campus information (65%). Individually, the most important features include: program and course descriptions (61%), career possibilities (56%), information about tuition and fees (55%), and admission requirements (52%).
- Half of applicants said their parents reviewed their viewbooks, brochures or calendars.
- Three-quarters of applicants accessed their institutions' calendars online, while 16% 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 (87%). Studentawards.com (20%). 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, including institution websites, emails from admission officers, viewbooks, and current students or graduates, were also the most influential. Friends, mail from admission officers and program brochures are also ranked high in terms of influence.
- Relatively small proportions, approximately one-third, used campus open houses and formal campus tours but they were rated very high in terms of influence when selecting a first-choice institution. Liaison presentations, informal campus visits and speaking with professors were also rated similarly. Phone calls from admission officers, along with various social media were less influential.
- In terms of information or orientation activities, over half of applicants consider career counseling (61%) financial aid advising (56%) useful as they enter their first year. Forty-six percent consider library/research/learning skills tutorials useful, 45% feel program course or transfer planning is useful, and 38% consider information about student services and activities useful for their first year.

### Technology Ownership

- A majority of applicants (80%) own a laptop, with Windows being the most common (63%). Three-quarters own a smartphone (73%), with Blackberry being the most popular (31%). Thirteen percent currently own some form of tablet, with iPad leading at 8%.

## Overall Summary

### Funding

- Over half of applicants to Ontario colleges (59%) plan on applying to a provincial student aid program (provincial government student loan) to help finance their education, while 22% 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 (79%), government student grants and loans (63%), 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 44% are funded by other types of scholarships/bursaries. Only 19% selected private loans as a contributor to their first year education.