

**ONTARIO  
COLLEGES .CA**

# **University/College Applicant Study 2015 UCAS™**

Final Report

September 2015

# Introduction and Methodology



# Introduction

- The University/College Applicant Study™ (UCAS™) has been surveying applicants for over 18 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 (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.

## Sections of the Report

Appendices A through E include all questions within the UCAS™ by Entry-type. The following are the definitions of each category.

- **Direct Entry** refers to applicants, 19 years old or younger, who were attending secondary school full-time or part-time since September 2014, and will have a completed or partial secondary school diploma (Grade 12 or less) as their highest level of education before they enrol in post-secondary studies.
- **Delayed Entry** refers to applicants who had completed or partially completed the requirements for secondary school graduation before September 2014, and have never participated in any post-secondary study.
- **PSE Transfer** refers to applicants who were attending a post-secondary institution (at college, university, CEGEP or trades school) at the time they completed the survey.
- **Past PSE Experience** refers to applicants who had previously studied at the post-secondary level (at college, university, CEGEP or trades school) but were not attending any institution at the time they completed the survey.

# Methodology

## Procedure

- A total of 61,696 full-time applicants to Ontario colleges opted-in to participate in the 2015 UCAS™: 59,568 English-speaking applicants and 2,128 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 12 to April 21, 2015. Reminder emails were sent on March 24 and April 8 to those who had not yet responded. Respondents who completed the survey were entered into a draw to win over \$5,000 in prizes.
- 14,331 college respondents completed the survey (13,661 English and 670 French) providing an overall response rate of 23%.
- This sample size provides results at the 95% confidence level of plus or minus 0.39 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 (78%). The average age of college applicants is 22.4 years. Small proportions are married (13%) and have dependent children (11%).
- Sixty percent of Ontario college applicants are working—48% part-time and 12% full-time. One-third are not working (26% of applicants are looking for work and 7% choose not to look for work).
- In terms of the regional distribution, nearly one-quarter of Ontario college applicants are from each of southwestern Ontario (23%) and central Ontario (23%), while 16% are from the GTA and Metro Toronto, respectively, and 15% percent are from eastern Ontario. A small proportion of college applicants are from northern Ontario (7%).
- The majority of all respondents (85%) are Canadian born. Of the 13% who are immigrants, 42% arrived in Canada since 2009. English is the language most spoken at home for 86% of applicants. The next most spoken language at home is French (4%).
- More than half of Ontario college applicants report being Caucasian/white (56%) and 20% belong to a visible minority group. Black (9%), South Asian (6%), and Chinese (6%), and First Nations (5%) students constitute the largest groups reporting a visible minority background. Seven percent of applicants to Ontario colleges are Aboriginal.
- Fifteen percent of all applicants report having at least one form of disability; 9% report a learning disability, 5% a mental health disability, and 2% a physical disability.

# Overall Summary

## Academic Profile of College Applicants

- Forty-two percent of all Ontario college applicants are direct entrants, 16% are delayed entrants, 27% are PSE transfer students, and 15% have past PSE experience.
- Thirteen percent of applicants applied to a university in addition to applying to a college or polytechnic.
- Nearly half of Ontario college applicants (46%) attended high school full-time or part-time at the time of application. Less than one-quarter (21%) were attending either college or university; 26% were not attending any school.
- The majority of applicants attended a public high school (no religious affiliation—65%; religious affiliation—28%); only 5% attended a private school.
- More than half of Ontario college applicants (53%) plan to obtain a college certificate, diploma, or advanced diploma as their highest credential, while 22% plan to obtain an undergraduate degree. Four percent plan on obtaining a graduate/post-graduate certificate or diploma, while 6% plan to obtain a Master's degree.
- The most popular programs among all Ontario college applicants are health sciences/kinesiology/nursing (25%), business (11%), social and community services (11%), fine art and design (9%), and skilled trades/applied technologies/apprenticeship (8%).
- The mean high school grade average among Ontario college applicants (self-reported) was 77.4% with nearly half of students falling between the 75% and 84% range (48%).
- A majority of Ontario college applicants (72%) are not first-generation students; 22% are first generation, that is, neither parent had *participated* in post-secondary education.

# Overall Summary

## Applied to PSE Outside of Canada

- Two percent of Ontario college applicants applied to a postsecondary institution outside of Canada.

## Certainty in Academic Choices

- More than three-quarters of 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 (80%).

# Overall Summary

## Key Decision Factors in Choosing First-choice Institution

- For one-third (33%) of applicants, the single most important reason for choosing an institution is the reputation of the program. Twenty percent consider the reputation of the school in terms of graduate employment outcomes, while 19% 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 include:
  - 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)
  - 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/tradition influence some applicants' decision to choose their first-choice institution (45%), academic reputation of the program/major (75%) and reputation of the institution (75%) are the two most impactful reputation factors. Institution and guidebook rankings has the least impact, with 53% 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 (73%) and investments in the latest technology and equipment (64%). Library collections and facilities and high profile research had the next highest impact (53% and 44%, respectively), while special programs for the academically gifted was the least impactful (25%).
- **Financial Factors:** Sixty-six 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 (54%), flexible course delivery (54%), and tuition costs (53%). The availability of merit-based scholarships is the least impactful financial factor, with only 39% of applicants saying it had a positive impact, and 57% 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 (68%). Applicants also ranked relevant industry in the area (59%), and graduates getting into top grad schools (58%) as having a positive impact. International exchange options had the least impact on applicants' choice of institution (70% stated no impact).

# Overall Summary

## Key Decision Factors in Choosing First-choice Institution

- **Campus Factors:** Sixty-six 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 (48% and 36%, 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 (71%). Recreational sports facilities (52%), clubs/social activities (46%) and off-campus urban life (46%) were somewhat positively impactful, while the majority of applicants (64%) 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 (67%), followed by small class sizes (59%), campus safety and security (57%) and personal attention during the application process (55%).

# Overall Summary

## Use of Marketing Materials

- The most commonly used type of information sources among all Ontario college applicants include websites and web portals (94%), recruitment activities or direct contacts with the institution (77%), recommendations (66%), institution-specific materials (61%) and social media (43%). Much smaller proportions used media rankings (6%). Individually, the most important factors include: education-related web portals (89%), institution websites (69%), email communication from the institution (50%), and institution viewbooks (48%).
- The majority of applicants use institution websites for checking admission status (58%), followed by searching for career information (52%). Smaller proportions use websites to check financial eligibility (39%), review FAQs (38%), browse a list of academic majors (37%), take a virtual tour (35%), watch videos (34%) and use site search engine (33%).
- Viewbooks are used most for academic information (86%), career/future plans (80%), cost/finances (74%) and campus information (62%). Individually, the most important features include: program and course descriptions (61%), career possibilities (60%), information about tuition and fees (57%), and detailed admission requirements (53%).
- More than half of applicants said their parents reviewed their viewbooks, brochures or calendars (54%).
- Among applicants who responded as to where they accessed their first-choice viewbook, 22% picked it up at the guidance office, 17% picked it up at a university of college fair, and 17% received it at a presentation at their high school.
- The most frequented web portal by a large margin is ontariocolleges.ca (85%). ScholarshipsCanada.com (16%), Studentawards.com (16%) and Schoolfinder.com (10%) are the only other web portals that are used by more than one-tenth of applicants to Ontario colleges.

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# Overall Summary

## Influence of Marketing Efforts

- Overall, the most influential marketing efforts among those who used them were campus open houses and formal campus tours. However, these were only used by 28% and 12% of applicants, respectively. Liaison presentations, informal campus visits, and speaking with professors were also used in low numbers but ranked high in influence.
- The institution's website was the most used, and also highly influential.

## Technology Ownership

- A majority of applicants (69%) own a laptop, with a Windows operating system being the most common (49%). Nearly nine out of ten own a smartphone (88%), with the iPhone being the most popular (48%). Twenty-seven percent own some form of tablet, with the iPad leading at 21%.

# Overall Summary

## Funding

- Fifty-eight 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 20% are not planning on applying for aid and 22% are not sure.
- Overall, applicants to Ontario colleges are concerned about funding their education. Nearly three-quarters of applicants are very much/somewhat concerned about having sufficient funding to complete PSE (74%). Seventy-two percent are worried about the amount of debt they might incur, 70% are concerned about the availability of bursaries and student loans, and 68% are worried about ability to repay the debt within a reasonable timeframe.
- Personal savings (31%), government loans (26%), and parents/family (25%) are the largest contributors to first year education costs among all applicants to Ontario colleges. Eleven percent expect to fund first year through financial aid from an institution, 5% through other scholarships and bursaries, and 3% through private loans.