
Applicant Data in Canada

Another Perspective on Access

December 2004

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Executive Summary

Do all qualified applicants from secondary school/CEGEP have access to university education? Have universities expanded first-year intakes in concert with the demands of the “echo boom”? Those are the two main questions examined in this research report, which also tries to catalogue the availability of applicant data across the country. The report focuses on the period from 1998 to 2003, years which coincide with the beginning of the post-secondary “echo boom” and consequent increase in demand for admission to university.

Applicant data reside, for the most part, with individual institutions. Other than in Ontario, there are no province-wide application centres for university applicants. In terms of actual applicant information, there is a relatively consistent set of questions that comprises a typical undergraduate direct-entry (from secondary school/CEGEP) application, but there is no national collection of such data. This study, therefore, relies on a combination of institutional surveys, provincial publications, special reports and special analyses to develop a better understanding of applicant information and trends in applicant demand.

As far as the two main questions are concerned (Do all qualified secondary school applicants from secondary school/CEGEP have access to university? and Have universities expanded first-year intakes in concert with the demands of the “echo boom”?), the answer is a qualified yes in both cases. In most provinces it appears that applicant demand from secondary school/CEGEP has been met, as first-year enrolment increases are keeping pace with demand. However, in British Columbia it is clear, over the period in question, that the increase in applicant demand from secondary school graduates is not being met. Moreover, in Alberta the most recent experience (fall 2003) represents a departure from the previous year in that applicant demand appears

to have outpaced the increase in the number of available spaces — at least at the University of Alberta. Having experienced one of the highest growth rates in the 18-19 year old population in the country, the Alberta situation bears close monitoring.

If access is defined as access to the *first-choice* program/university, the answer appears to be no to both questions. As noted in a Council of Ontario Universities’ press release from June 19, 2003, regarding the accommodation of the “double cohort” in Ontario, “81% of these applicants accepted an admission offer from one of their top three choices,” and “this year 46% of those accepting offers accepted an offer of admission to the program of their first choice. This is close to last year’s figure of 49%.”¹ In conversations with individuals from other provinces, it is clear that applicants are being provided with an opportunity to attend university — but not necessarily to attend their program of choice.

Whether a province’s 18- to 19-year-old cohort is growing, holding steady or declining may have a significant impact on demand for university education, institutional admission and enrolment policies, and provincial post-secondary education policies and funding arrangements. At the one end of the spectrum, B.C. and Alberta experienced growth of approximately 30 per cent in that age cohort between 1990 and 2003, while at the other end Newfoundland experienced a decline of about 30 per cent. Ontario experienced an increase of 10 per cent and Saskatchewan also experienced an increase of a similar magnitude, while the remaining provinces experienced declines relative to 1990 (the Maritime provinces) or ended the period with an age cohort of similar size to 1990 (Quebec, Manitoba). Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick and Quebec ended the period on a downward trend while the remaining provinces were experiencing growth in the post-secondary age cohort (Figure 1).

1. Ross Paul and Jamie Mackay, quoted in the Council of Ontario Universities’ June 19, 2003, press release.

Given the major differences in trends in the size of the 18–19 year-old cohort across the country, it is not surprising there are also significant differences in terms of applicant demand and the impact on first-year enrolment. For example, as noted, there is an access problem in British Columbia. In Alberta increases in applicant demand appear to have been accommodated through expansion, although, as noted, the fall 2003 situation is somewhat different than earlier years and bears monitoring. Demographics, however, are not the only determinant. Newfoundland, despite a significant decline in the size of the post-secondary age cohort, has experienced relatively stable first-year undergraduate enrolment, suggesting that the demographic reality is being offset by higher participation rates. In Quebec, where the age cohort peaked in 1999 and has been in decline since, the absolute number of applicants and direct-entry registrants is relatively unchanged, suggesting the participation rate is increasing.

A myriad of other issues arose while the study was being conducted, and they warrant comment and further research. For example, there has been no attempt to determine how the quality of the educational experience has been affected by increased enrolment over the period in question. Nor has there been any attempt to document or examine the implications of changes in admission standards during the same timeframe. While there is some evidence that minimum posted entrance averages have increased at some institutions,² it would be useful to collect *actual* entering average data *by program* to determine the extent of change over a given period.

Defining a “qualified applicant” is a project unto itself and should involve organizations such as the Association of Registrars of Universities and Colleges in Canada, perhaps in concert with the Canadian Institutional Research and Planning Association. A common set of definitions established by individuals who have a working knowledge of the intricacies of applicant situations would help immeasurably in the future collection of such information.

Documenting provincial policy statements on accessibility and provincial funding initiatives aimed at improving accessibility was beyond the scope of this project. However, a review of these two areas would provide added context for interpreting the applicant data and the response of universities over the period.

In addition to the above, it would be useful to conduct research to improve understanding of:

- prospective applicant pools
- the socio-economic and ethno-cultural characteristics of applicants
- success in securing admission to the program and institution of choice
- the extent of admission to programs aimed at non-traditional applicants
- the level of admission from sources other than direct entry from secondary school/CEGEP such as college transfers, university transfers, delayed secondary-school entrants and international sources
- constraints on admission to undergraduate second-entry and graduate programs
- the impact of international recruitment on offers of admission to domestic students, and
- applicant data collection processes in other jurisdictions.

This study has shed some light on applicant demand, but it is clear that further effort is required to fully understand and document applicant demand and the many factors that influence prospective university students to take the necessary first step of applying to a university. At the same time, there is a need to better understand factors affecting the supply of university spaces (the capacity) including provincial funding policies, institutional enrolment objectives in the context of admission policies and standards, capital requirements, and the availability of faculty and staff.

2. Junor and Usher, *The Price of Knowledge*, pp.18–25. (Also see: *The Price of Knowledge 2004*.)

It is important to note that over the period in question there have been considerable increases in government funding and tuition. Those funding increases have resulted in more space, increased numbers of faculty and staff, and increased operating funding generally, suggesting that increasing “access” is very directly related to increasing capacity. As of the fall of 2003, it appears that universities have, in general, met the challenge of providing initial access to the “echo boom” generation, with the exception of British Columbia. Whether the universities can deal with the cumulative impact of increased participation, increased intakes and increased flow-through to upper years, professional programs and graduate studies remains to be seen. The potential impact on access requires continued monitoring.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	vii
1. Introduction	1
2. Outline of the Study	1
3. Methodology	1
4. Considerations	2
Provincial Demographics	2
Provincial Post-Secondary Arrangements	3
Other Considerations	3
5. The Current State of Applicant Data in Canada	5
Applicant Data — Definitions	5
How Are Applicant Data Collected?	5
What Data Are Collected?	6
6. Findings by Province	7
British Columbia	7
Alberta	9
Saskatchewan	11
Manitoba	11
Ontario	12
Quebec	14
New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island	15
Newfoundland and Labrador	16
7. Discussion	17
8. Observations and Areas for Further Research	18
9. Conclusions	19
Bibliography	21
Appendix A	
Overall High School Graduation Rates (1999–2000)	23
Appendix B	
Alberta Duplicate Application Detection Project Data and Post-Secondary Transitions	25

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I. Introduction

The Government of Canada established the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation in 1998 with the goal of increasing access to post-secondary education through the funding of scholarships. In 2001, the Foundation began the Millennium Research Series, a comprehensive program examining issues related to post-secondary access. This report has been prepared as part of that research initiative.

The purpose of this study is twofold: to determine the availability of applicant data for students applying from secondary school to enter their first year of university studies and, insofar as it is possible to do

so, to determine whether first-year enrolment is keeping pace with applicant demand from secondary school graduates. Traditional methods of measuring increases in enrolment and participation rates do not provide a complete picture of “access,” because the number of applicants is not part of the equation. A review of applicant trends will add another dimension to the existing information about accessibility. As well, this study has potentially significant implications concerning the capacity of Canadian universities to accommodate additional enrolment and meet accessibility demands.

2. Outline of the Study

This national study seeks to determine the availability of applicant data across the country and to collect applicant data in a fashion which allows for trend comparisons with existing enrolment data. *The study focuses on applicants from secondary schools to*

*direct-entry programs.*³ It also tries to augment the applicant data analysis with supplementary information to reconcile the differences between applicant data and registrant data.

3. Methodology

The methodology involved reviewing primary and secondary sources to determine the availability of applicant data from the late 1990s until now — a period that in some parts of Canada marked the beginning of the “echo boom”⁴ in post-secondary bound students. After a review of the available data, an institutional survey was used to collect specific applicant information from universities in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. Information for B.C., Alberta, Ontario, Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador was derived from existing published reports and special requests for applicant information (in the case of Ontario and Quebec). Additionally, application processes and forms from a number of institutions were reviewed to determine the kind of applicant information that is collected. The intent was not to provide an exhaustive collection of data but rather to

collect enough information to address the specific research questions noted earlier. While the data that have been collected do not represent 100% of applicants in the country, they do account for approximately 85% to 90% of first-year undergraduate enrolments originating from secondary schools/CEGEPs.⁵

After collecting the information, a number of ratios are calculated — e.g., the proportion of qualified applicants vis-à-vis the proportion of first-year registrants, the proportion of first-year registrants vis-à-vis the 18 or 19-year-old provincial age cohorts⁶ — to determine whether institutions are increasing first-year enrolments in concert with increased applicant demand. The results of the data analysis are then considered along with other sources of information to arrive at a set of conclusions.

3. In Quebec, however, the focus is on applicants from CEGEP.

4. The use of the term “echo boom” originated with D. Foot and D. Stoffman’s, *Boom, Bust & Echo* (1996) and refers specifically to the large cohort of children that are the offspring of the “baby boomers.”

5. This estimate is based on first-year data reported to *Maclean’s* and provided to the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.

6. In Quebec and Ontario the 19 year-old cohort is used to compute specific ratios in the tables. In other provinces the 18 year-old cohort is used.

4. Considerations

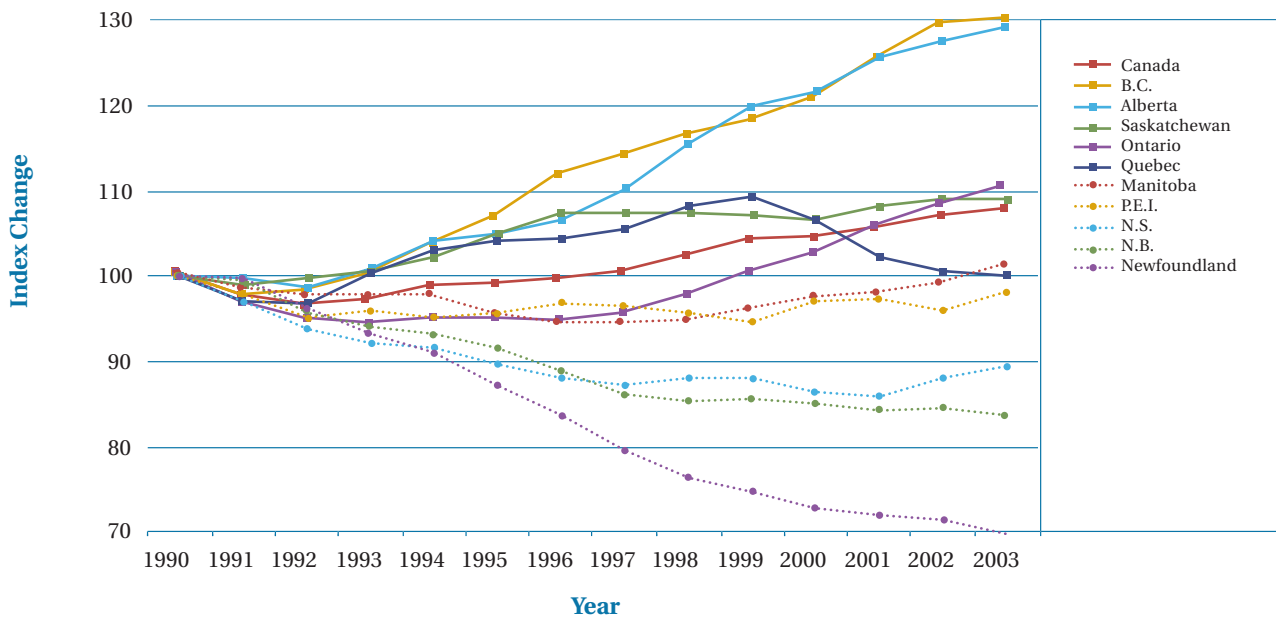
Provincial Demographics

Before turning to the applicant data, it is important to recognize that there are significant differences in the combined 18- to 19-year-old demographic by province,⁷ as illustrated in Figure 1. The graph clearly indicates that, at the two ends of the spectrum, B.C. and Alberta experienced significant growth in this age cohort between 1990 and 2003, while Newfoundland experienced a constant decline. While the echo boom is a national reality, its impact is quite different across the country.

With respect to other provinces, Saskatchewan's 18- to 19-year-old cohort increased in the early to mid-1990s and is now almost 10% larger than it was

in 1990. Manitoba, on the other hand, experienced a decline in the size of this age group for part of the 1990s, but more recently the numbers have increased, and the cohort is now slightly above its 1990 level. The steady growth observed in Ontario's 18- to 19-year-old population since the late 1990s has resulted in its current level surpassing the 1990 level by almost 10%, while in Quebec a more recent trend has brought the cohort back to its 1990 level. Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and P.E.I.'s 18- to 19-year-old cohorts have decreased in size since 1990, but have been relatively stable for the past several years.

Figure 1 — Index Change for 18- to 19-Year-Olds by Province (1990=100)



Source: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, based on 2001 census update.

7. The 18- to 19-year-old cohort is deemed, for the purposes of this study, to be the age group for entry to post-secondary studies.

Whether a province's 18- to 19-year-old cohort is growing, holding steady or declining may have a significant impact on demand for university education, institutional admission and enrolment policies, and provincial post-secondary education policies and funding arrangements. Given this study's emphasis on the period from the late 1990s to 2003, the differences in provincial demographics for the post-secondary entry cohort in that particular time period are of particular interest. It should be recognized, however, that the change in the size of the cohort is but one factor to be considered among many. The secondary school graduation rate may, in fact, be of greater relevance, since it is that particular credential that often becomes the absolute minimum admission requirement for university.⁸

Provincial Post-Secondary Arrangements

Canada's university sector comprises ten distinct provincial entities, each with its own funding mechanisms, governance approaches and organizational structure. In some cases, the universities in a particular province are charged (implicitly or explicitly) with ensuring that all qualified applicants are provided with an opportunity for a *university* education. In other cases, the provincial post-secondary accessibility policy appears to focus on providing an opportunity *somewhere* in the post-secondary arena — whether it be at a university, college or university college.

Other Considerations

It is important to reiterate that this study is intended to determine the availability of applicant data for students applying from secondary school to their first year of university. Throughout the consultations across the country, it was evident that there is considerably more pressure with respect to second-entry professional programs — that is, entry to first-year university studies is easier than entry

into professional programs. Further research is needed to determine the extent of the limits on accessibility to such programs.⁹

Additional research is also needed for several student types who are not considered in this study:

1. *Non-Secondary-School Applicants*: Initially, some data were collected on non-secondary-school applicants, and it is clear that in some institutions and jurisdictions “other” applicants — e.g., college-transfer students, mature students, delayed secondary-school applicants, international students, out-of-province domestic students, university-transfer students — are an important source of student enrolment. However, it is equally clear that there is no standard method of categorizing these applicants across the country. Accordingly they are not included in this study.
2. *Qualified Non-Applicants*: It is possible — and indeed likely — that there are prospective university students who do not progress to the applicant stage. For a variety of reasons, qualified students — i.e., students who meet the minimum admission standards — may elect not to apply.
3. *Non-Qualified Applicants*: At the same time, there are applicants who may not possess the minimum qualifications to be considered for university yet may have a desire to obtain a university education. It is worth noting that many institutions have special admission programs or provide other opportunities for applicants who do not meet minimum admission criteria.

Since the application process tends to span several months, applicants may apply based on the assumption they will meet the stated minimum qualifications. Some applicants will in fact fail to meet this minimum standard — yet for data collection purposes they may still be counted as applicants. It is therefore important to differentiate between “applicants” and “qualified applicants.”

8. See Appendix A for the most recent published graduation rates. For additional information on graduation rates, see the Canadian Education Statistics Council's *Education Indicators in Canada*, Figure C7.1, p. 100.

9. As well, the issue of access to graduate programs would be worth examining, especially in light of projected increases in demand for these programs.

As was expected, compiling the data in a consistent, comparable form proved to be a difficult task for a variety of reasons:

- Information technology system changes at the institutional level during the period in question resulted in some information simply not being available in a comparable form for that time-frame.¹⁰
- In most provinces, there is no applicant tracking mechanism to determine if a student has applied to more than one institution — either in that province or elsewhere. The application process in Ontario (handled by the Ontario Universities' Application Centre) does allow for applicant tracking, but only within the Ontario university system. After the fact reporting — i.e., after the student has registered — in B.C., Alberta and Quebec addresses the issue of multiple applications from a single applicant, but the data have significant limitations (with the exception of Quebec).
- Data definitions proved problematic because there is no universally agreed definition of “applicant” across the country. For example, when do you “count” an applicant as an applicant? What about applications that have been withdrawn by the student? What about incomplete applications? How do you define an “incomplete” application? How do you take into account differing policies regarding the status of an application and the payment of an application fee? How should alternate offers of admission be counted?

Despite the preceding limitations, some useful data are available in some provinces, and there is the potential for additional information in the next few years.

10. Many institutions began planning and implementing new administrative systems in the latter part of the 1990s, driven by factors such as Y2K concerns and legacy system reporting limitations. Such initiatives tend to result in rather lengthy transition periods, during which the priority is simply supporting basic operations. Less emphasis is placed on retaining comparable data for future analysis.

5. The Current State of Applicant Data in Canada

Before turning to a province-by-province review of applicant information, it may be useful to review some basic definitions which will be used in the remainder of the text.

Applicant Data – Definitions

An *applicant* is an individual who actually applies to a university. He or she may or may not be qualified to apply; thus, the first refinement of “applicant” is to try to differentiate between “applicants” and “qualified applicants.” That distinction is especially important in trying to determine if applicant demand is being reflected in actual enrolment.

A *qualified applicant* is defined as an individual who has applied and at least meets the stated minimum academic requirements in terms of course prerequisites and academic achievement. That individual may or may not receive an offer of admission, depending on whether there is competitive entry into the university and/or program of choice. Alternatively, the individual may apply to one program but be offered admission in another program.

An *admitted applicant* is an individual who receives an offer of admission from the institution to which he or she has applied.

A *confirmed applicant* is an individual who has responded to the offer of admission and indicated his or her acceptance of the offer of admission. Generally, confirmed applicants actually register at the university; however, there is no guarantee that the applicant will not accept an offer at another institution.

Finally, a *registered applicant* is an individual who actually registers at a university and is still registered at the university’s official “count date.” In some provinces, the time between being an *applicant* and becoming a *registered applicant* can be quite lengthy. In Ontario, for example, the process spans

almost a full year — a student applies in December of one year, registers in September of the following year and is ‘officially’ counted in November.

With respect to defining qualified applicants, it is instructive to note that, according to Junor and Usher, “during the 1990s entrance requirements to Canadian universities became, on the whole, more restrictive. No institution had a lower academic admissions standard in 2001 than it did in 1985, and in over 50% of cases the standard was higher.”¹¹

There is no single repository of applicant data in Canada that covers *all* of the various definitions of an applicant. Registered applicants are, in practical terms, equivalent to currently enrolled students, and are reported as such to Statistics Canada. However, there is no cross-Canada collection of data on applicants, qualified applicants, admitted applicants or confirmed applicants.¹²

How Are Applicant Data Collected?

With the exception of Ontario (and, to a limited degree, B.C.), high-school students apply directly to the institution of choice based on application processes established by each institution. Ontario has a central application centre where the vast majority of all undergraduate applications for full-time study are processed — namely, the Ontario Universities’ Application Centre (OUAC).¹³ In B.C., the Post-Secondary Application Service of British Columbia (PASBC) provides a focal point for applications to post-secondary institutions within the province. It offers a service utilising a “Common Form” for basic personal information (name, biographical details and some optional personal characteristics). However, individuals are “transferred” to the B.C. institution of choice to complete the application. PASBC is not mandatory: applicants can apply directly to the chosen university without visiting the PASBC site.

11. Junor and Usher, *The Price of Knowledge*, p.18. (Also see: *The Price of Knowledge 2004*.)

12. Statistics Canada’s Enhanced Student Information System (ESIS) does not collect applicant information. However, there are specific data elements that may help with related research in the future. For example, information about educational entrance requirements, limited-enrolment programs, and whether a student met “normal entrance requirements” may provide useful supplementary information to future applicant studies.

13. While the vast majority of undergraduate applications and applicants are processed through the Ontario University Application Centre, many universities also have their own processes for applicants who do not “fit” the OUAC application cycle.

Alberta Learning, in concert with the Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer, compiles application data from all post-secondary institutions in the province, after the fact. In B.C., an after the fact analysis of grade 12 B.C. applicants is conducted jointly by the University of British Columbia, Simon Fraser University, the University of Victoria and the University of Northern British Columbia. In Quebec, applicant data are collected after the fact by the Conférence des Recteurs et des Principaux des Universités du Québec. Applicant data in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, the Maritime provinces and Newfoundland are housed in individual institutions.

In some cases, provincial agencies have conducted supplementary analyses to “track” secondary-school graduates in a given year. In other cases, the data to conduct such a study may be available, but, to date, the actual research has not been initiated.

What Data Are Collected?

In general, there is a fairly standard set of information that is collected through the application processes across the country, as illustrated in Figure 2. In some provinces, additional information is required, such as a provincial ID number — e.g., Quebec Students’ Permanent Code (*Code Permanente*), Alberta Learning ID Number or B.C. Provincial Education Number.

Other kinds of information may be requested on the application form. For example, Dalhousie University has a section which asks, “What Influenced Your Decision to Apply to Dalhousie?” Applicants are offered answers such as “family,” “friends,” “alumni,” “Dalhousie promotional materials,” etc. At the University of Saskatchewan, the application form contains an optional section on Educational Equity and asks about Aboriginal ancestry, disabilities and visible minority status. The University of Saskatchewan also requests information about the families of university graduates. At the University of Alberta, the application form contains a

section for Aboriginal students. There is also a section asking the applicant if he or she would like information about services for students with disabilities or serious health conditions. At the University of Victoria, there is a voluntary declaration section regarding Aboriginal status, disabilities, visible minority status and sexual orientation.

Figure 2 — Information Collected Through the University Application Process

Name
Gender
Address(es) (mailing, home)
Phone Number
Date of Birth
Social Insurance Number
Email Address
Citizenship
Status in Canada
Marital Status
First Language
Language of Correspondence
Program Choice by University
Expected Enrolment Date
Full-Time/Part-Time Status
Previous Year Application
Previous Year Registered
Last Secondary School Attended:
Location
Dates
Program
Diploma
All Post-Secondary Institutions Attended or Being Attended:
Name
Location
Dates
Program
Diploma/Degree
Activities When
Not a Full-Time Student:
Activity
Dates
Employer (if appropriate)

In sum, the application form for entry to first-year university studies tends to be rather generic, with some institutions choosing to use the application process to ask institution-specific supplementary questions. Readers should note that the preceding examples are intended to be purely illustrative. In some programs, additional information is requested as part of the application/admission process: portfolio submissions are required in fine art programs, auditions are often part of the application process

for music programs, and so on. As well, in Ontario where there is a centralized application process, some universities require a supplementary application form that is sent directly to the institution by the applicant.

Although certain personal attributes are collected as part of the basic application process, (gender, age, citizenship, first language, marital status, etc.) socio-economic information is not directly collected, nor, with a few exceptions, is ethno-cultural information.

6. Findings by Province

British Columbia

In B.C., as mentioned previously, students apply directly to individual universities either through PASBC or directly to the institution.¹⁴ Applicant data for grade 12 B.C. students are collected after the fact on a voluntary basis by the four largest universities — the University of British Columbia, Simon Fraser University, the University of Victoria and the University of Northern British Columbia. An annual analysis of such data has been conducted since the mid-1990s by the Office of Analytical Studies at Simon Fraser University with the goal of shedding some light on basic admissions questions about grade 12 graduates in B.C. and the four participating universities:

- “How many BC12 grads apply anywhere?”
- Do many grads apply to more than one institution?
- How many grads are minimally qualified?
- How many grads get offers from anywhere?
- How many qualified grads do not get any offers?
- How many grads register anywhere?”¹⁵

Using Provincial Education numbers, the study tracks B.C. secondary school graduates as they apply to and enter B.C. universities. The intent is solely to provide an analysis of B.C. grade 12 applicants. No student characteristics are provided and the data are thus of limited utility for determining the personal characteristics of students who apply to and attend university.

The analysis of the B.C. Grade 12 data over time concludes that:¹⁶

Access to B.C. universities for B.C. grade 12 graduates continues to deteriorate. Although the proportion of qualified grade 12 graduates applying to B.C. universities has remained relatively constant at approximately 28% over the past seven years, the proportion of secondary school graduates who receive admission offer(s) has declined from 27% to 23% and the proportion of secondary school graduates that registered declined from 20% to 17%.¹⁷

14. In its own words, “PASBC makes applying for public post-secondary education quick and easy. Twenty-five of B.C.’s universities, university colleges, colleges, and institutions are now accepting applications through Canada’s first Internet application-for-admission service.” (<http://www.pas.bc.ca/>)

15. Walter Wattamaniuk, *Measuring Demand for Admission to Research Universities in British Columbia*, Powerpoint presentation at the Canadian Institutional Research and Planning Association’s annual conference, “Navigating New Waters in Institutional Research,” held in Halifax, October 26–28, 2003.

16. Joanne Heslop, “BC12 Applicants to B.C. Universities: Fall, 2001” (memorandum distributed on January 8, 2002), p. 3. The memorandum is included as an appendix to *Analysis of Applications, Admissions, and Registrations of B.C. College Transfer Applicants to B.C. Universities 2001–02*, available at <http://www.bccat.bc.ca/pubs/heslop2002.pdf>.

17. *Ibid.*, p.3.

For 2003 it was reported that:

A total of 12,113 applicants qualified for general admission to at least one university, but admission offers only went out to 10,007 students. Therefore, 2,106 university qualified B.C. secondary school students did not receive any offers of admission to B.C. universities in Fall 2003.¹⁸

Furthermore, the author notes that:

This figure actually under-represents the shortfall of spaces for new students in B.C. universities because many qualified students do not apply to university since they have *a priori* knowledge that their grades are lower than the quota minimum entrance requirements.¹⁹

Readers should note that in the following table the definition of a qualified applicant is determined by the institution. The applicant data are taken from the fall 2003 update of the study by Joanne Heslop and show a growing *absolute* gap between the number of qualified applicants and the number of offers of admission. It should be noted that, since 2000, the B.C. study has focused on *completed* applications to derive the applicant numbers. Prior to that year, all applications (complete and incomplete) were included in the analysis. The apparent decrease in

applicants in 2001 is therefore likely a result of the change in definition.

The data reported by Heslop indicate that the proportion of qualified applicants is increasing, while actual first-year enrolment from B.C. secondary schools has shown a proportional decline over the past three years. This is consistent with Heslop's observation that there are an increasing number of qualified applicants who are not finding a place in B.C. universities. Illustrated another way, the percentage change in "Qualified Applicants" from 1998 to 2003 has increased by 18.9% but the "First-Year Enrolled" figures have only increased by 14.1% over the same period. Interestingly, the percent increase in the number of "Qualified Applicants" is almost double the percentage increase in the 18-year-old population — an indicator of the overall strength of applicant demand from B.C. secondary schools.

In an attempt to provide another estimate of unmet demand, Walter Wattamaniuk, Director of Analytical Studies at Simon Fraser University, reported that a marks analysis of *all* B.C. grade 12 graduates indicated that more than 5,800 graduates could be deemed qualified but did not register at a B.C. university in 2002. Of that number, approximately 2,100 students had grade averages of at least 75%.²⁰

Table 1 — Summary of B.C. Applicant Data (1998–2003)

University of British Columbia, University of Victoria, University of Northern British Columbia and Simon Fraser University

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	% Change
Applicants	12,006	12,806	13,439	12,878	13,447	13,233	10.2%
Qualified Applicants	10,188	10,595	11,141	11,626	11,948	12,113	18.9%
As a % of Applicants B/A	85%	83%	83%	90%	89%	92%	
Offers of Admission	8,881	8,975	9,653	9,984	10,097	10,007	12.7%
As a % of Qualified Applicants C/B	87%	85%	87%	86%	85%	83%	
First-Year Enrolled	6,517	6,643	7,144	7,547	7,471	7,436	14.1%
As a % Offered Admission D/C	73%	74%	74%	76%	74%	74%	
First-Year Enrolled as % Qualified D/B	64%	63%	64%	65%	63%	61%	
18-year-old population	52,503	53,210	54,626	56,664	57,818	57,711	9.9%
Qualified as % of 18-year-old Pop.	19.4%	19.9%	20.4%	20.5%	20.7%	21.0%	
First-Year as % of 18-year-old Pop.	12.4%	12.5%	13.1%	13.3%	12.9%	12.9%	

Source: J. Heslop, BC12 Applicants to B.C. Universities, Analytical Studies, Simon Fraser University, 2003.

18. Joanne H, “

The British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer (BCCAT) encourages post-secondary institutions to “develop policies that facilitate transferability of post-secondary credit courses so that credit can be applied toward baccalaureate degrees in all degree-granting institutions.”²¹ In 2001–02, the BCCAT contracted with Simon Fraser University to initiate a study on transfer students from B.C. colleges, university colleges and institutes. In the same presentation in which he identified the number of potentially qualified B.C. grade 12 students who did not apply to B.C. universities, Wattamaniuk reported that about 1,100 qualified *transfer* applicants did not receive an offer of admission to one of the four B.C. universities in the study.²²

In a report focused specifically on access and capacity, the University Presidents’ Council of British Columbia (TUPC) noted that “universities across the province are already turning away too many qualified students.”²³ TUPC goes on to argue that “limitations on the number of available seats at the university level has challenged the ability of universities to continue to receive the same numbers of qualified students from the college system.”²⁴

Taken as a whole, the data suggest there is a significant problem with respect to access to universities in British Columbia.²⁵ Moreover, the data also suggest that the problem is growing; however, it should be noted that the impact of university colleges on access from secondary school has not been examined in this study.

In light of the growth in the 18- to 19-year-old cohort noted earlier, it should not be surprising that an access problem is developing in B.C. In addition, during the latter part of the 1990s the secondary school graduation rate increased markedly, compounding the unmet demand.²⁶

Alberta

In Alberta, students apply to individual universities. Applicant data are collected after the fact by the Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer (ACAT). The applicant data from Alberta institutions form the basis of the Duplicate Application Detection (DAD) project aimed at “determin[ing] the extent of duplicate applications between institutions and more clearly understand[ing] the province-wide picture of applications and admissions issues.”²⁷ Since 1997, the data from the DAD project are also used by the Alberta Government (specifically, Alberta Learning) to produce an annual report on educational outcomes of Grade 12 students called *Post-Secondary Transitions in Alberta*.²⁸

The DAD project and the annual report on *Post-Secondary Transitions in Alberta* together represent an informative set of data about the number of individuals in Alberta secondary schools who go on to some form of post-secondary education in the province. Unfortunately, there is limited information about the personal characteristics of the secondary school applicant pool and the analysis of the data is quite limited in terms of using what is available to identify characteristics. The DAD project includes *all* applicants (i.e., out-of-province and in-province) and captures applications to all post-secondary programs. From that perspective, the DAD data set has the potential for further analysis, but to date the analysis has focused on the issue of duplicate applications and tracking Alberta secondary school students who apply to an Alberta post-secondary institution.

21. British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer (BCCAT) <http://www.bccat.bc.ca/council/mandate.html>

22. W. Wattamaniuk, op.cit.

23. TUPC, *Will I Get In?*, p.2.

24. *Ibid.*, p.3.

25. This may be one factor that affects B.C.’s “export” of post-secondary students to other provinces.

26. In 2004, the British Columbia government announced its intention to add 25,000 new spaces to the post-secondary sector.

27. Alberta Council on Admissions and Transfer, *Duplicate Application Detection Project: Fall 2002 Reports and Summary Tables*, p.1.

28. *Post-Secondary Transitions in Alberta* focuses on the grade 12 cohort from Alberta secondary schools entering post-secondary institutions each fall.

Based on the DAD project data and the *Post-Secondary Transitions in Alberta* reports, it appears that:

- about 65% of university applicants from Alberta secondary schools actually end up registering at a university (See Appendix B for the detailed calculation); and
- this ratio was actually increasing over the period prior to 2001, suggesting that the increase in applicant demand from Alberta secondary schools was being met by Alberta universities. However, the actual grade 12 registrant data was only available up to and including 2000 and thus one cannot tell if that trend continued through to more recent years.

A particular note of interest in Alberta is the reported graduation rate of secondary school students, which

is about 10 percentage points below the Canadian average, and has been relatively constant during the latter part of the 1990s.²⁴

To determine whether institutional data tell the same story as the DAD information, the University of Alberta was selected for closer examination, first because of its relative size and second, because of the availability of applicant data. The University of Alberta Office of the Registrar and Student Awards produces an annual statistical report that provides more detailed applicant data than that provided through the DAD project. The University of Alberta data, although somewhat different from the data considered above, likewise suggest that, generally, increases in applicant demand were met through increased offers of admission — although there is a noticeable decrease for the fall 2003 and a consequent decrease in first-year enrolment.

Table 2 — Summary of University of Alberta Applicant Data (1998–2003)

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	% Change
A Applicants	4,708	4,989	4,807	4,875	5,639	5,837	24.0%
B Qualified Applicants	3,580	3,652	3,648	3,718	4,171	3,996	11.6%
As a % of Applicants B/A	76%	73%	76%	76%	74%	68%	
C Offers of Admission	3,509	3,557	3,572	3,610	4,156	3,773	7.5%
As a % of Qualified Applicants C/B	98%	97%	98%	97%	100%	94%	
D First-Year Enrolled	3,380	3,373	3,173	3,217	3,700	3,350	-0.9%
As a % Offered Admission D/C	96%	95%	89%	89%	89%	89%	
First-Year Enrolled as % Qualified D/B	94%	92%	87%	87%	89%	84%	
18-year-old population	41,973	43,557	44,264	45,745	46,409	47,004	12.0%
Qualified as % of 18-year-old Pop.	8.5%	8.4%	8.2%	8.1%	9.0%	8.5%	
First-Year as % of 18-year-old Pop.	8.1%	7.7%	7.2%	7.0%	8.0%	7.1%	

Source: Office of the Registrar and Student Awards, Summary of Statistics (Annual, 1998–99 to 2002–03)
Updated from Web site February, 2004 <http://www.registrar.ualberta.ca/sosfiles/2003-2004/Tab14.5.pdf>

The ratio of enrolled first-year students relative to qualified applicants decreased over the period. However, it is important to note that a host of factors can influence this figure, including offers from other institutions and other opportunities. Accordingly, the more telling figure is the ratio of offers of admission to qualified applicants, which was relatively constant until 2003. In that year the University of Alberta increased its minimum required entrance averages and plans to increase them again in 2004 in

the face of a projected increase in applicant demand. Accordingly, if this study is updated in the future, the data may well tell a story of increasing discrepancy between applicant demand from Alberta secondary schools and actual first-year enrolment at the University of Alberta. However, to assess whether the situation in Alberta, as a whole, is changing, one needs to rely on updated information from the DAD Project and the *Post-Secondary Transitions in Alberta* report.

29. The presence of a relatively strong labour market demand for “oil-patch” workers perhaps helps to mitigate the impact of the lower graduation rate. However, that lower graduation rate may also impact Alberta’s continued desire to encourage a more integrated post-secondary arrangement that facilitates movement into the post-secondary sector at various levels, as well as movement from college to university.

Saskatchewan

In Saskatchewan, prospective students apply directly to universities. For the purposes of this study, the University of Saskatchewan and the University of Regina were contacted to determine if applicant data were available. In the case of the University of Saskatchewan, applicant data were not available due to information system changes. However, communication with University of Saskatchewan personnel indicated that, in general, all qualified applicants are

offered admission to the university. If a student applies to a program with an enrolment quota and is not admitted, the student will be given an admission offer to another program.

In the case of the University of Regina, data were compiled that present a picture of applicant demand since 1999. Applicant data are not available prior to 1999 due to information system changes.

Table 3 — Summary of University of Regina Applicant Data (1999–2003)

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	% Change
A Applicants	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	
B Qualified Applicants As a % of Applicants B/A	NA	1,972	2,060	2,279	2,105	2,205	
C Offers of Admission As a % of Qualified Applicants C/B	NA	1972	2,060	2,279	2,105	2,205	
D First-Year Enrolled As a % Offered Admission D/C	1,135	1,190	1,303	1,337	1,250	1,310	15.4%
First-Year Enrolled as % Qualified D/B		60%	63%	59%	59%	59%	
18-year-old population	15,619	15,662	15,584	15,911	15,945	15,766	0.9%
Qualified as % of 18-year-old Pop.		12.6%	13.2%	14.3%	13.2%	14.0%	
First-Year as % of 18-year-old Pop.	7.3%	7.6%	8.4%	8.4%	7.8%	8.3%	

Source: B. Christie, University of Regina

The University of Regina data indicate that the proportion of qualified candidates who actually enrol has been quite stable during the period in question, and the actual number of enrolled students has increased as a percentage of the 18-year-old population. Readers should note that the total number of applicants is not available, but the current policy is to offer admission to all qualified applicants.

Manitoba

In Manitoba, as in Saskatchewan, prospective students apply directly to universities. For the purposes of this study, applicant trend data were collected from the University of Manitoba. Due to computing system limitations the University of Manitoba was only able to provide data beginning in 1999.

Table 4 — Summary of University of Manitoba Applicant Data (1999–2003)

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	% Change
A Applicants		3,254	3,518	3,629	3,868	4,029	23.8%
B Qualified Applicants As a % of Applicants B/A		3,254	3,518	3,629	3,868	4,029	23.8%
C Offers of Admission As a % of Qualified Applicants C/B							
D First-Year Enrolled As a % Offered Admission D/C		2,494	2,704	2,775	2,906	3,012	20.8%
First-Year Enrolled as % Qualified D/B		77%	77%	76%	75%	75%	
18-year-old population	15,800	16,025	16,218	16,204	16,619	16,794	6.3%
Qualified as % of 18-year-old Pop.		20.3%	21.7%	22.4%	23.3%	24.0%	
First-Year as % of 18-year-old Pop.		15.6%	16.7%	17.1%	17.5%	17.9%	

* % Change from 1999

Source: Zenon Kurjewicz, University of Manitoba.

University of Manitoba has an apparent open admissions policy for entry into University 1 — the first year of studies for most programs. Students then apply to “second-entry” programs that are much more competitive in terms of admission. The applicant data for Manitoba exclude incomplete applications as well as applicants who did not meet the admission standards for some direct-entry programs.³⁰ Accordingly, the applicants in these data have been categorized as qualified applicants. With the open admissions policy, the ratio of registrants to applicants is approximately 75% and has remained relatively constant over the period in question, thus indicating the university has expanded first-year intakes to accommodate the increased demand. At the same time, it appears that the increase in registrants has outpaced the overall increase in the 18-year-old population, suggesting an increase in the participation rate for that age cohort. It should be remembered, however, that there is no way to tell whether an applicant has applied elsewhere in Manitoba (or in other provinces or countries), and thus the fact that a student did not register at the University of Manitoba does not mean that he or she did not find a place at another university in the province or elsewhere.

Ontario

The Ontario Universities’ Application Centre (OUAC) acts as the processing arm for undergraduate admissions and some professional programs in Ontario.³¹ Each year OUAC produces a report for Ontario universities that summarizes application and applicant data. The Council of Ontario Universities has been producing *Application Statistics* based on OUAC data since 1973.

One of the pieces of information that has been produced for many years is a summary of applicant information that indicates how many qualified applicants did *not* receive an offer of admission from any Ontario university. Over the past five years the absolute number of qualified applicants receiving no offers of admission increased from about 1,800 to 3,200 or from approximately 3.8% of qualified applicants to 5.3% of qualified applicants.³² It is important to note that “qualified” is defined by the provincial government and is generally defined as a minimum average of 60% in a prescribed set of courses. The province introduced a new secondary school curriculum in 1999, and effectively changed the requirement for a secondary school diploma from five years to four years, thus producing a double cohort of secondary school graduates for the fall 2003.³³

30. Readers should also note that applicants/registrants are Manitoba students who were considered for admission on the basis of their high school marks, therefore the data include individuals who did not proceed directly to university from high school but rather applied — on the basis of their high school marks — afterwards.

31. OUAC was founded in 1971 by the Council of Ontario Universities and the Ontario Universities’ Council on Admissions. The fall of 1972 marked OUAC’s first official processing cycle for first-year undergraduate applications. More details can be found at <http://www.ouac.on.ca/>.

32. Council of Ontario Universities’ special analyses (48,183 qualified applicants and 46,350 offers in 1998, compared to 60,588 qualified applicants and 57,359 offers of admission in 2002).

33. Individuals interested in more details about the double cohort should visit the Council of Ontario Web site www.cou.on.ca.

Based on the OUAC data and estimates from the Council of Ontario Universities, (and notwithstanding the anomalous double cohort) it appears that first-year enrolment from Ontario secondary schools has generally kept pace with the increase in qualified applicants. With respect to the provincial government's commitment to ensuring a place for every qualified student, the estimate for 2003 suggests that the number of first-year registrants — as a proportion of qualified applicants from secondary schools — has remained relatively similar to previous years, a conclusion reflected in a June 2003 press release issued by the Council of Ontario Universities.³⁴ While the *actual* proportion of first-year enrolled students

to qualified applicants did decrease slightly in 2003 relative to the previous year (from 80 percent to 79 percent) the proportion of offers of admission to qualified applicants actually increased from 95 percent to 96 percent, indicating that the universities were prepared to accept more applicants.

The magnitude of the projected change in student demand in Ontario necessitated a significant increase in government funding — capital and operating — to increase capacity. For much of the period in question (1998 through 2003) preparing for the double cohort was the single most important issue and ultimately created an environment that encouraged significant expansion.³⁵

Table 6 — Summary of Ontario Applicant Data (1998–2003)

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003(e)	% Change
A Applicants	53,669	56,505	57,151	57,995	67,291	98,043	82.7%
B Qualified Applicants	48,183	50,713	51,070	51,750	60,588	87,847	82.3%
As a % of Applicants B/A	90%	90%	89%	89%	90%	90%	
C Offers of Admission	46,350	48,992	48,719	49,640	57,359	84,069	81.4%
As a % of Qualified Applicants C/B	96%	97%	95%	96%	95%	96%	
D First-Year Enrolled	38,910	40,854	39,768	41,390	48,567	69,208	77.9%
As a % Offered Admission D/C	84%	83%	82%	83%	85%	82%	
First-Year Enrolled as % Qualified D/B	81%	81%	78%	80%	80%	79%	
First-Year Enrolled as % Applicants D/A	72%	72%	70%	71%	72%	71%	
19-Year-Old Population	147,299	151,672	156,424	159,762	165,053	167,415	13.7%
% Qualified as % of 19-year-old Pop.	32.7%	33.4%	32.6%	32.4%	36.7%	52.5%	
% First-Year as % of 19-year-old Pop.	26.4%	26.9%	25.4%	25.9%	29.4%	41.3%	

2003 Estimates

Applicants based on increase of secondary school applicants 45.7%

First-Year enrolled based on secondary school confirmed applicants increase 42.5%

Qualified Applicants — five-year average between applicants and qualified applicants

Source: Council of Ontario Universities, Special Analyses for “qualified applicants.”

Excludes visa applicants in Ontario Secondary Schools and part-time applicants.

34. Council of Ontario Universities' press release, “Acceptances of Offers Reflect Historical Norms,” June 19, 2003.

35. Ontario's SuperBuild capital program, announced in 1999, represented the most significant capital infusion since the 1960s and helped create the physical capacity to accommodate student demand. The government's commitment to provide operating funding to address the projected enrolment growth provided the additional piece of the funding equation that resulted in increased capacity.

Other Applicant Information in Ontario

Since the purpose of this study is to catalogue the availability of applicant information, it is important to note a particular initiative in Ontario. Since the mid-90s, an annual survey using OUAC applicant data has been conducted by the ACUMEN Research Group. Initially, several universities participated in the ACUMEN survey but, beginning in 2002, the Council of Ontario Universities co-ordinated an expansion of the survey to include virtually all Ontario universities. Billed as “University Student Market Research,” the ACUMEN exercise is a sample survey of 20,000 applicants (both high school applicants and other applicants) and asks a series of questions across a broad range of topics, as follows:

- Background Information:
 - Demographic Characteristics
 - Academic Characteristics
- University Perceptions:
 - Factors Influencing University Selection
 - University Reputations — Rating Ontario Universities for Academic Quality
 - Recruitment Communication
 - Attending University — Concerns
- Applicants’ Top Three Choices:
 - University Position
 - Factors that Make First Choice Better
- Internet Usage:
 - Applicant Access to the Internet
 - Useful Information on University Web sites
 - Applicant’s Use of the Internet
 - Laptop Programs at University

Although the ACUMEN survey does not directly address the issue of the number of qualified applicants (the random sample is drawn from all first-year applicants), there are questions that help determine how many applicants have applied to colleges in Ontario and elsewhere, other universities in Canada or colleges/universities outside Canada.³⁶

Taken as a whole, the ACUMEN initiative provides a reasonably rich source of information about university applicants to Ontario universities and the factors that influence university choice.

Quebec

In Quebec, students apply to individual universities directly from *Collèges d’enseignement général et professionnel* (CEGEPs). As noted previously, applicant data are collected after the fact by the *Conférence des Recteurs et des Principaux des Universités du Québec* (CREPUQ). The *Code Permanent* effectively provides the means for CREPUQ to account for multiple applications and focus on the number of applicants that actually register in a particular institution. Essentially, a qualified applicant is defined as a CEGEP graduate with a *Diplôme d’études collégiales*. It is expected that as long as an applicant has that credential and the appropriate prerequisite courses (*profil d’accueil*), he or she will be accepted for general admission to at least one Quebec university. In some cases, students with a technical diploma are also eligible for university.³⁷

The CEGEP data indicate quite clearly that Quebec universities are meeting the demand for places — a demand that, so far, defies the underlying demographic. As the traditional post-secondary entrance age cohort has decreased in absolute size, demand for university education has remained stable in absolute terms — actual participation rates have thus increased over the period in question.

36. Basically, the survey indicates a decreasing interest in applying to college, and for 2003 an increased interest in applying to universities outside Ontario — likely attributable to the double cohort.

37. In a recent *Bulletin Statistique de L’Éducation*, “Cheminement Scolaire: Du Collégial à L’Université” (June 2003), it was reported that over 20% of 2000–01 CEGEP graduates with technical diplomas were enrolled in university in the autumn of 2001.

Table 7 — Summary of Quebec Applicant Data (1998–2002)

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003(e)
A Applicants	26,275	26,715	26,587	26,097	26,286	
B Qualified Applicants	26,275	26,715	26,587	26,097	26,286	
As a % of Applicants B/A	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
C Offers of Admission	25,055	25,622	25,455	25,050	25,080	
As a % of Qualified Applicants C/B	95%	96%	96%	96%	95%	
D First-Year Enrolled	20,737	21,307	21,166	20,959	21,048	
As a % Offered Admission D/C	83%	83%	83%	84%	84%	
First-Year Enrolled as % Qualified D/B	79%	80%	80%	80%	80%	
19-Year-Old Population	100,857	103,886	103,120	98,387	95,231	95,617
% Qualified as % of 19-year-old Pop.	26.1%	25.7%	25.8%	26.5%	27.6%	
% First-Year as % of 19-year-old Pop.	20.6%	20.5%	20.5%	21.3%	22.1%	

Source: Conférence des Recteurs et des Principaux des Universités du Québec, special analyses.

New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island

In the Maritimes, individuals apply directly to universities. For the purposes of this study, one university in each province was considered: Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia, the University of New Brunswick and the University of Prince Edward Island.

With only one university in the province, the applicant figures for the University of Prince Edward Island are, in effect, the total applicant figures for the jurisdiction. The University of Prince Edward Island was not surveyed as part of this study, but its annual first-year intake is approximately 600 to 700 students.

The University of New Brunswick was contacted to determine if applicant data were available. Unfortunately data, ultimately, were not made available. Time constraints precluded contacting other institutions in New Brunswick to determine if applicant data could be made available.

In Nova Scotia, Dalhousie University was surveyed to determine the availability of applicant data and to determine if there were trends in the data. Dalhousie University is by far the largest university in Nova Scotia and trends there may be seen as indicative of trends in the province as a whole.

The Dalhousie data indicate that the number of applicants from Nova Scotia high schools has decreased over the period in question; however, total first-year enrolment from all sources — Nova Scotia, other provinces, and other countries — has increased markedly since 1999, from about 2,450 students to well over 2,900 in 2003. Accordingly, while the institution may be feeling the impact of demographic changes in Nova Scotia, it appears that it had the capacity to accept additional qualified applicants from within the province had they applied.³⁸

The applicant data from the Maritimes are sparse, but overall enrolment trends certainly suggest that the universities are prepared to expand. For example, Dalhousie University increased its total enrolment by almost 16% from 2000 to 2002 and has plans to continue to grow to over 18,500 students by 2007 (from a projected 2003 level of about 15,420).³⁹ A recent report from the Maritimes Provinces Higher Education Commission (MPHEC) suggests that overall enrolment trends in the Maritimes have followed national patterns, while participation rates in the Maritimes are currently higher than the national average.⁴⁰ The demographic situation in the Maritimes, as noted earlier, is considerably different from Ontario, Alberta and B.C., and the MPHEC

38. Dalhousie University provided very useful applicant data for this project but requested that the data not be published in tabular form. Individuals interested in more detailed information about applicants should see footnote 39.

39. Dalhousie University, *Enrolment Planning and Management Report #4*, May 28, 2003. (http://www.dal.ca/~sradmin/files/Enrolment_Report_4.pdf)

40. Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission, *Profile of Maritime University Students*.

report suggests that if past trends hold true, the Maritime universities will see increased enrolment demand from out-of-province students. The report provides no indication that this will cause a problem with respect to accessibility to Maritime universities by Maritime secondary school students.

Newfoundland & Labrador

Like the University of Prince Edward Island, Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN) is the

only university in the province, and thus accounts for all applicant data within the jurisdiction. To determine the relationship between the number of first-year enrolments and population demand, data from the *MUN Fact Book* (2003) were accessed and suggest that first-year enrolments have been increasing or holding stable despite a continuing decrease in the size of the 18-year-old age group, which traditionally provides most university applicants. It should be noted that first-year data include students from outside the province.⁴¹

Table 8 — Summary of Memorial University of Newfoundland First-Year Enrolment (1998–2003)

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Undergraduate First-Year	3,066	3,134	3,287	3,179	3,077	3,120
18-year-old population	8,646	8,376	8,138	8,172	8,023	7,724
First-Year as % 18-year-old population	35%	37%	40%	39%	38%	40%

Source: Memorial University of Newfoundland, Fact Book, 2003.

With respect to Newfoundland and Labrador high school students specifically, the most recent President's Report from MUN indicates that the percentage of high school students eligible to attend who actually enrolled has increased each year from 1997 to 2002, thus suggesting that MUN is meeting the demand from Newfoundland and Labrador high schools students.⁴²

41. In its 2001 university-ranking issue, *Maclean's* reported that 5.4% of undergraduate first-year students at Memorial University were from outside the province. In its 2003 issue the comparable figure was 3%.

42. <http://www.mun.ca/2003report/> and see Vital Signs.

7. Discussion

It appears that — with the exception of B.C., where an access gap was present prior to 1998 — Canadian universities have generally kept pace with increases in applicant demand from secondary-school/CEGEP students by expanding the number of first-year enrolments accordingly. Thus, if we ask, whether first-year enrolment is keeping pace with applicant demand from secondary school/CEGEP, the answer is a qualified yes with the exception of British Columbia, where it is clear that over the period in question applicant demand from secondary school graduates is not being met. The situation in Alberta deserves careful monitoring because, at least at the University of Alberta, the most recent experience (fall 2003) represents a departure from the previous few years and applicant demand appears to have outpaced the increase in the number of available spaces. Relative to other provinces, since 1990, both B.C. and Alberta have experienced the greatest increases (almost 30%) in the size of the 18- to 19- year-old age cohort — the traditional source of the majority of university applicants.

If access is instead defined as access to the student's *first-choice* program/university, the answer — insofar as we can judge from the available information — is no. As noted in a press release issued by the Council of Ontario Universities on June 19, 2003, regarding the accommodation of the double cohort: “81% of these applicants accepted an admission offer from one of their top three choices,” and, “this year, 46% of those accepting offers accepted an offer of admission to the program of their first choice. This is close to last year’s figure of 49%.”⁴³ In conversations with individuals from other provinces, it was clear that applicants are being provided with an opportunity to attend university but not necessarily to attend

their program of choice — and that this is determined by the admission standards set by universities and the capacity of individual programs. Moreover, it was reported that at least one major university in Western Canada plans to increase admission “cut-offs” in the future in an effort to hold first-year intake levels close to 2003 levels.

In terms of data availability, it appears that B.C., Ontario and Quebec have processes in place to collect applicant data in a manner that ensures each applicant is unique and multiple applications per applicant can be identified. In Alberta, the DAD project provides a reasonable process for addressing the same issues, but the absence of a unique identifier leaves some room for error. In Saskatchewan, Manitoba, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia there is no process for determining whether secondary school students in those provinces have applied to more than one university in the province. In P.E.I. and Newfoundland, the applicant data from secondary schools is unique, because there is only one university in each province. Other than through the ACUMEN survey of applicants to Ontario universities, however, one cannot determine the proportion of applicants that applied outside the province.

43. Ross Paul and Jamie Mackay, quoted in the Council of Ontario Universities’ June 19, 2003, press release.

8. Observations and Areas for Further Research

This study has focused on two very specific issues: 1) the availability of applicant data, and 2) whether first-year enrolment is keeping pace with applicant demand from secondary schools/CEGEP. However, during the research, a myriad of issues arose which warrant comment and further investigation.

There has been no attempt to determine how the quality of the educational experience has been affected by increased enrolments over the period in question.

There has been no attempt to document changes in admission standards over the period in question. While there is some evidence that minimum posted entrance averages have increased at some institutions,⁴⁴ it would be useful to collect actual entering average data by program to determine the extent of change over a given period. Doug Hart, an institutional researcher at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, noted in a review of public attitudes towards higher education that, in Ontario, “commitment to access is balanced by commitment to standards. Doors are to be opened but only to the qualified and the motivated.”⁴⁵ The implications for changes in admission standards and practices bear further investigation.

Defining a “qualified applicant” is a project unto itself and should involve organizations such as the Association of Registrars of Universities and Colleges in Canada (ARUCC), perhaps in concert with the Canadian Institutional Research and Planning Association (CIRPA). A common set of definitions established by individuals who have a working knowledge of the intricacies of applicant situations would help immeasurably in the future collection of such information.

Documenting provincial policy statements on accessibility and provincial funding initiatives aimed at improving accessibility was beyond the scope of this project. However, a review of those two areas would provide added context for interpreting the applicant data.

In the case of funding generally, a recent report from the Canadian Education Statistics Council indicates that *total expenditures* by universities increased in absolute terms (after adjusting for inflation) in every province from 1997–98 to 2001–02 (estimated) — although it is important to note that such expenditures included sponsored research and capital.⁴⁶ How much this funding may have improved access is worthy of further study but it certainly appears that the presence of such funding has increased the capacity of universities to accept more students.

There are significant differences in the post-secondary education arrangements among the provinces. Other than the B.C. study cited earlier (Wattamaniuk) there has been no attempt to determine the impact of college transfer arrangements on subsequent access to universities. Applicant data does exist in B.C., Ontario and Quebec (and to a lesser extent Alberta) that could be used to determine the proportion of college students that apply to university and register.

Further research is required in a host of other areas, to develop a better understanding of:

- prospective applicant pools
- the socio-economic and ethno-cultural characteristics of applicants
- the degree of success in securing admission to the program and institution of choice
- the extent of admissions through programs aimed at non-traditional applicants
- the level of admission from sources other than secondary school/CEGEP (college transfers, university transfers, delayed secondary-school applicants, international sources, etc.)
- constraints on admission to undergraduate second-entry programs and graduate programs
- the impact of international recruitment on offers of admission to domestic students, and
- applicant data collection processes in other jurisdictions.

44. Junor and Usher, op.cit., pp.18–25. (Also see: *The Price of Knowledge 2004*.)

45. Doug Hart, *A Short History of Public Views on Higher Education in Ontario*, presentation at the CIRPA Conference held in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in October, 2003.

46. Canadian Education Statistic Council, *Education Indicators in Canada*, Table B1.1, p.271.

9. Conclusions

The review of the availability of applicant data indicates that B.C., Alberta, Ontario and Quebec have some system-wide data available that can be analysed to determine applicant trends among students applying directly from secondary schools.

B.C. is working towards providing a more comprehensive picture by including an analysis of applicants to university colleges and has already undertaken a study on applicants to universities from B.C. colleges and university colleges. The Provincial Education Number provides a vehicle for tracking B.C. secondary school students throughout their post-secondary career.

In Alberta, the DAD project and the *Post-Secondary Transitions* Report provide a very good start in terms of providing some basic information about the number of applicants — in this case, applicants in all programs from both inside and outside Alberta. Given the goals of the DAD project, the current report is sufficient to determine applicant flows. However, the possibility exists for further analysis that would shed more light on the characteristics of applicants.

In Ontario, reports from OUAC and the ACUMEN research study together provide a good set of system-wide information about applicants to first-year university studies. The lack of certain kinds of information in the application process is compensated for by the ACUMEN survey. Special analyses can be conducted through the Council of Ontario Universities and the OUAC.

The situation in Quebec is similar to Ontario's in that there is a central repository of applicant information that can be matched to registrant information. Special analyses can be conducted through CREPUQ.

In all other provinces, application and applicant data are collected and held by institutions. Accordingly, in provinces with more than one university there is no way of knowing whether the applicant has applied elsewhere. As the only universities in their respective provinces, the University of Prince Edward Island and Memorial University of

Newfoundland are able to collect applicant data from secondary schools without being concerned about the issue of applicants completing additional applications to other universities in the same jurisdiction. However, with the exception of the ACUMEN survey in Ontario, there is no information about the proportion of applicants that apply outside their own province (including to other countries).

The absence of a national database or national collection of applicant data limits our understanding of the many factors associated with applicant demand. At the same time, it should be recognized that competitive realities mean that institutions may be unwilling to voluntarily provide such information. Consequently, at least for the foreseeable future, we are left with a patchwork of data sources that can shed some light on the issue of applicant demand but leave a number of important questions unanswered.

With respect to whether universities are able to meet applicant demand, the data for the period in question suggest that the answer is a qualified yes. In the face of continued growth in the post-secondary age cohort, however, and the flow-through effects of increased intakes over the past few years, it may be the case that in some provinces the rate of expansion is simply not sustainable, thus leading to increased admission standards, especially in programs with existing enrolment quotas.

This study has shed some light on applicant demand, but it is clear that further effort is required to fully understand and document applicant demand and the many factors that influence prospective university students to take the important first step of applying to an institution.

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Appendix A

Overall High School Graduation Rates (1999-2000)

Overall High School Graduation Rates

	1999-2000
CANADA	78%
Newfoundland and Labrador	82%
Prince Edward Island	84%
New Brunswick	86%
Nova Scotia	77%
Quebec	85%
Ontario	78%
Manitoba	77%
Saskatchewan	79%
Alberta	66%
British Columbia	75%

Source: Canadian Education Statistic Council, Education Indicators in Canada, Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, and Statistics Canada, November 2003, Table C7.2 p.338.

Appendix B

Alberta Duplicate Application Detection Project Data and Post-Secondary Transitions

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	% Change	
Total Applicants									
Alberta	5,903	6,158	6,374	6,956	6,770	7,202	8,476		
Calgary	5,230	4,989	5,271	5,641	5,863	6,164	6,563		
Lethbridge	1,596	1,393	1,190	1,412	1,503	1,764	1,669		
Total	12,729	12,540	12,835	14,009	14,136	15,130	16,708		
Duplicate Applicants									
Alberta	1,984	1,900	2,056	2,327	2,469	2,527	2,966		
Calgary	1,642	1,493	1,590	1,984	2,040	2,189	2,529		
Lethbridge	552	468	484	549	631	609	673		
Total	4,178	3,861	4,130	4,860	5,140	5,325	6,168		
Individual Applicants									
Alberta	3,919	4,258	4,318	4,629	4,301	4,675	5,510		
Calgary	3,588	3,496	3,681	3,657	3,823	3,975	4,034		
Lethbridge	1,044	925	706	863	872	1,155	996		
Total	8,551	8,679	8,705	9,149	8,996	9,805	10,540	23%	
18-year-old population	38,715	40,046	41,973	43,557	44,264	45,745	46,409	47,004	21%
Applicants as % Population	22.1%	21.7%	20.7%	21.0%	20.3%	21.4%	22.7%		
Gr 12 Registrants (from Post-Secondary Transitions Report)		5,509	5,569	6,018	6,114				
Registrants as % Individual Applicants		63%	64%	66%	68%				